Feynman "playing a chieftain in a student production of *South Pacific*." [From *Genius*; Gweneth Feynman]

distractions is rare enough—if it has adequate quickness—to be called "genius" and to produce results as if by magic. It seems to me that it may have been because of this knowledge of his own finiteness that Feynman could not bear to see minds as good as his own hobbled by unnecessary nonsense, and this in turn led to some of his rudest outbursts.

The review of this book in the *New York Times*, which seemed to treat this as a popular physics book, on the model of Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, was wide of the mark. This is not intended to be a book to learn physics from, though in fact Feynman's work lends itself well to verbal description rather than to a cursory mathematical one. On the whole the book is not scientifically inaccurate; it gives the nonspecialist a good overview of the essentials and even gives some credit to others, as I remarked above; at worst, it glamorizes some of Feynman's minor works a bit. It deserves to be a best-seller as a good, well-written biography of one of the century's outstanding geniuses, not as coffee-table science.

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A Pandemic Reconstrued

AIDS and Accusation. Haiti and the Geography of Blame. PAUL FARMER. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1992. xiv, 339 pp. $35. Comparative Studies of Health Systems and Medical Care, vol. 33.

It is perhaps a historical accident that the AIDS pandemic has coincided with major theoretical shifts in the humanities and social sciences. These shifts have led to the emergence of a critical perspective that questions accepted paradigms and subjects them to a searing critique, deconstructing meanings and reducing "scientific facts" to mere cultural representations. Whether through accident or not, the accepted medical and social "truths" about AIDS have been subjected to critical reappraisal and revision perhaps more quickly and with more intensity than has been the case for any other disease in human history.

At the center of these attacks has been a concern with the role of cultural stereotypes and victim-blaming in the discourse on AIDS. Assumptions about the role of homosexuals, Africans, prostitutes, and Haitians in the AIDS pandemic have all been subjected to scrutiny by anthropologists, historians, and literary critics. Few of these studies have explored their subject with as much sensitivity, breadth of vision, or attention to the multiple layers of meaning that surround the occurrence of AIDS as Paul Farmer's beautifully written study of AIDS in Haiti.

This book is not simply another critique of victim-blaming. It is rather an attempt to place the history of AIDS in Haiti, and Haiti in AIDS, in a wider historical context. Farmer argues that this context has shaped both the epidemiology of AIDS in Haiti and the meanings given to AIDS by Haitian villagers, Haitian-Americans who have been labeled as AIDS transmitters, U.S. health officials who have constructed these ascriptions, and U.S. popular opinion.

Farmer demonstrates that accepted medical facts about the role of Haitians in the spread of HIV/AIDS emerged from a mix of cultural misunderstanding and sloppy epidemiological research, supported by a long history of popular misconceptions about Haiti, Haitians, "voodoo," "zombies," and "blood magic." These misconceptions stretch back to the period of Haitian independence, when the world's first black republic was viewed by its neighbors as a regional and international pariah. Drawing on more recent epidemiological research, Farmer shows how, contrary to what U.S. health officials and the popular media assumed, AIDS began in Haiti in much the same way in which it emerged in the United States, hitting homosexual communities and recipients of blood transfusions first. Only later, as Haiti sank into economic despair and both men and women were forced to sell their bodies for cash, did AIDS enter the heterosexual population and Haiti acquire what the World Health Organization has termed Type II AIDS.

Farmer also shows how Haiti's declining economic fortunes, which have served as a catalyst for the spread of AIDS, were directly related to U.S. political and economic policies, reaching back to the early 19th century. The diplomatic isolation of Haiti following the revolution, the use of gunboat diplomacy to extort large sums of money from Haiti's dwindling treasury, the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and the subsequent penetration of the Haitian economy by large-scale agricultural interests, which accelerated the impoverization of much of the island's population, all contributed to the island's economic woes. Finally, in the 1980s, as if to add insult to injury, early assumptions about the role of Haitians in the spread of HIV/AIDS, legitimated by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Food and Drug Administration, dried up a once-lucrative tourist industry. Farmer traces this long list of insults and shocks that the United States has inflicted on the political and economic body of Haiti. At the same time, he explores the consequences of these assaults for individual Haitians who have succumbed to HIV/AIDS.

Embedded in Farmer's contextualization of the relationship between AIDS and Haiti are the lives of the people of Do Kay. Do Kay is a small village of once-prosperous farmers who lost their land to the waters that backed up behind a dam that was constructed to provide electricity for the people of far-away Port-au-Prince. Farmer begins and ends his study in Do Kay, tracing the arrival of AIDS, the responses of the people of the village to this new disease, and their efforts to give meaning to its occurrence. Farmer's sensitive exploration of the lives and deaths of the people of Do Kay give his study a distinctly human face and an emotional edge that moves the study and the reader beyond the cynical gaze of post-modernism and political economy. The book is at the same time fiercely personal and coldly objective. The result is both moving and illuminating.

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