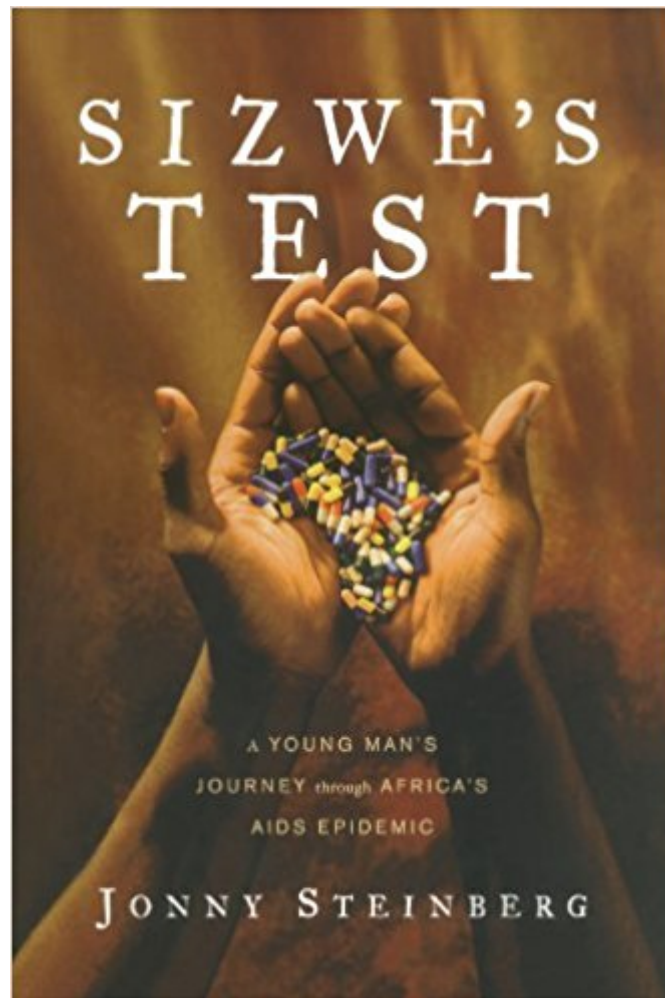




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Sizwe's Test: A Young Man's Journey Through Africa's AIDS Epidemic



Synopsis

At the age of twenty-nine, Sizwe Magadla is among the most handsome, well-educated, and richest of the men in his poverty-stricken village. Dr. Hermann Reuter, a son of old South West African stock, wants to show the world that if you provide decent treatment, people will come and get it, no matter their circumstances. Sizwe and Hermann live at the epicenter of the greatest plague of our times, the African AIDS epidemic. In South Africa alone, nearly 6 million people in a population of 46 million are HIV-positive. Already, Sizwe has watched several neighbors grow ill and die, yet he himself has pushed AIDS to the margins of his life and associates it obliquely with other people's envy, with comeuppance, and with misfortune. When Hermann Reuter establishes an antiretroviral treatment program in Sizwe's district and Sizwe discovers that close family members have the virus, the antagonism between these two figures from very different worlds -- one afraid that people will turn their backs on medical care, the other fearful of the advent of a world in which respect for traditional ways has been lost and privacy has been obliterated -- mirrors a continent-wide battle against an epidemic that has corrupted souls as much as bodies. A heartbreaking tale of shame and pride, sex and death, and a continent's battle with its demons, Steinberg's searing account is a tour-de-force of literary journalism.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Award-winning South African journalist Steinberg, a gay white man, conceived this book to understand the AIDS crisis in his country and, to a limited degree, in himself: though HIV

testing and treatment are readily accessible, he wondered, why did so many abstain? Steinberg journeys to the poor black village of Ithanga, where antiretrovirals (ARVs) are available, but electricity and running water are not. He examines the disease through the pseudonymous Sizwe Magadla, a 30-year-old shopkeeper who has resisted testing. Sizwe becomes Steinberg's interpreter and explains the village's traditional health-care system in which witchcraft thrives and Western medical missionaries challenge healers and herbalists. Steinberg traces Sizwe's growing awareness of the myths and realities of the three letters—AIDS—one persistent belief, that whites created and deployed HIV as a means to regain power, echoes the legacy of apartheid still overshadowing the country—and his attempts to reconcile cultural beliefs with increasingly unassailable medical facts. Steinberg becomes intertwined with his subject, but balances critical distance and compassion with gleanings from his own psychological barriers to HIV testing that further deepen the concern and understanding he accords to Sizwe's story. (Feb.) Copyright © 2006 Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Journalist Steinberg wonders how, in a rapidly evolving socioeconomic situation such as South Africa's, it is possible to record more than a thousand new HIV infections per day. He notes that, despite the best efforts of government and the international organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors without Borders), one in eight South Africans has AIDS. Where, he asks, is the disconnect? Why aren't more South Africans taking advantage of the medical resources available to them? Are there, indeed, enough resources to go around? To answer those and further questions, Steinberg embedded himself in a small village in the rural district of Lusikisiki in Eastern Cape Province and shadowed a young man, a shop owner named Sizwe. The resulting profile of him, his family, friends, and the local MSF facility is a real eye-opener. Besides a portrait of what life is like for the people negotiating this transitional period, Steinberg offers a candid glimpse into Sizwe's private thoughts and fears, which likely mirror those of many of his countrymen. --Donna Chavez --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Jonny Steinberg clearly and humanely presents the dilemma facing Sizwe, one of thousands of South Africans who face what Westerners regard as the essential HIV test. Partly in response to the South African government's inaction and dismissal of the pandemic of HIV and AIDS, Médecins Sans Frontières establishes a program to educate villagers about HIV and to disseminate ARVs.

Testing seems an obvious choice to Jonny and Dr. Hermann Reuter (of MSF): If Sizwe takes the test and has positive results, he will be prescribed ARVs that will keep him healthy and able to support his family. But Sizwe fears his village's reaction. A positive HIV result brings disdain: he's witnessed it himself when others have tested. Everyone knows that those who don't emerge quickly after receiving their results are being counseled so they can deal with their illness. If Sizwe tests positive, it's likely that he'll lose the clientele he's built up for his shop. He also knows that if he dies, his family will seize his hard-won earnings instead of taking care of his young son. There are also fears that westerners have discovered a cure for AIDS and are deliberately holding it back from Africans. If this seems far-fetched, think of how many conspiracy theories are churning around the internet, from Princess Diana's death to speculations about 9/11. Having worked in Kenya, I can attest to the deep divide between accepting western medicine and traditional reliance on the herb doctors. Chinua Achebe captures a similar division (over religion) in *The River Between*. Jonny Steinberg discusses this Sizwe's vacillation (he wants to test but he daren't) with great sensitivity, compassion, and intelligence. He even includes a discussion with Sizwe: by telling Jonny "black secrets", has Sizwe betrayed his people? I couldn't put this book down. It's an enlightening journey, at least for this reader. Jonny also includes a booklist for further reading. Can't wait to read the next Steinberg!

Mr Steinberg has written a very interesting book which I highly recommend to readers who want to learn more about the economic, political, medical and cultural obstacles in the fight against HIV in South Africa (and I think much of what Steinberg writes about is also very relevant for other African countries). I particularly liked the sections of the book (which are largely prevalent) where the author simply reports on events and conversations. The book becomes more speculative and in my opinion just a bit pretentious when he tries to theorize about his experiences. But this is a little downside in a very well written book which apparently (judging from the very low number of reviews and the ranking) not enough people have read. I am grateful to the author for his work, and to "Sizwe" and the other characters of this book for sharing their thoughts and experiences with us. Two books you may be interested in reading if you liked this one are LeBlanc's *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx* and Racine & Racine's *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable*. Very different subjects for sure, but both are equally interesting and well-written books about lives of individuals in troubled environments which most readers will be only marginally familiar with.

Awesome read! I had to read this for a class, and I thought it would be kind of boring; but it was really insightful and interesting! Writing is really beautiful too.

This is the best and most enlightening book on HIV available today. Steinberg outdoes himself, especially within explaining something that is otherwise inexplicable: the high infection rate of HIV in Southern Africa. Steinberg's approach is that of a true journalist, and we are left with a complex, unjudging portrait of an incredibly intricate story laced with race, history, culture, myth, belief, medicine, superstition and politics. Buy it for everyone you know...

This is a great account of the complexities in treating HIV/AIDS in a setting with a complex history of colonialism, racism, and poverty. Steinberg is honest about his own biases as he tries to understand what makes for a successful or unsuccessful health intervention. A great book for anyone interested in solutions to the HIV pandemic, especially those who are approaching the disease from a western mindset.

This book was better than I thought. I had to read this for a medical anthropology class. This book was kind of a mystery as well as a personal account. The ending leaves you shocked. I would recommend this book.

want to know about how africa deals with AIDS, this book is a must read.

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