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Review of *Goldberger's War: The Life and Work of a Public Health Crusader* by Alan M. Kraut; Hill & Wang, 2003

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Kraut, Alan M. ***Goldberger's War: The Life and Work of a Public Health Crusader***. New York: Hill & Wang, 2003. 314 pp. ISBN 0-374-13537-1, $25.00.

The story of the scourge of pellagra, a fatal niacin deficiency characterized by a severe skin rash, diarrhea, and dementia, has faded into obscurity in this country. With a mortality rate of upwards of 30 percent, it plagued the southern United States as late as the 1940s, claiming the lives of hundreds or thousands of impoverished Southerners every year.

Joseph Goldberger's family, Hungarian Jews, emigrated to New York City in 1883 when he was nine years old. He became a scientist working in the U.S. Public Health and Marine Hospital Service. An occasional victim of the pathogens he studied, Goldberger made great strides in helping to determine how to avert infection.

Goldberger's success led him to be assigned to work on the perplexing cause of pellagra, which was thought originally to be infectious in origin. Over the years, Goldberger and his associates narrowed pellagra's cause to a component of the B vitamin complex. This was a highly unpopular conclusion because of the implicit indictment of the South's inability, due to poverty, to nourish its citizens. Goldberger pressed his cause and recommended simple diet modification to abate the tide of grave discomfort and death that pellagra brought. Goldberger died at the age of 54 of a renal tumor before niacin (nicotinic acid) was named as the substance responsible for preventing pellagra.

This well-written, well-researched, readable book would be good for young adults and college students to learn about a medical pioneer who successfully navigated the political landscape of epidemiology, and who wanted to make a real difference in the world.

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