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Designs For Life: Molecular Biology After World War II



Synopsis

Molecular biology has come to dominate our perceptions of life, health and disease. In the decades following World War II, the Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology at Cambridge was a world-renowned center of this emerging discipline. Crick and Watson, among others, did the work that made them famous in this laboratory. Soraya de Chadarevian's important new study is the first to examine the creation and expansion of molecular biology and its place on the postwar governmental agenda through the prism of this remarkable institution.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"I enjoyed this book tremendously, and would highly recommend Design for Life to any reader with an interest in the history of the sciences." Laurette Geldenhuys, Dalhousie University, in The Canadian Bulletin of Medical History "The book is thoroughly and professionally researched and a significant contribution to the history of molecular biology." Isis "de Chadarevian's historical account is recommended to all who are interested in the development of molecular biology." Nature "De Chadarevian offers a timely book, pertinent because of the recent 50th anniversary of the publication of Watson and Crick's description of DNA..... For all 'students' of molecular biology. Recommended." Choice "Designs for Life makes a contribution both to the history of molecular biology and to the history of science and technology in postwar Britain" Bulletin of Science Technology and Society "This is an excellent book....a well-written, extensively researched book that sheds new light on the evolution of molecular biology....a very significant contribution to the

literature on the history of molecular biology." Journal of the History of Medicine"With its many perspectives on the rise of molecular biology in Britain, Designs for Life will be appreciated by biologists, historians, and those involved with science policy. The book will surely interest anyone intrigued by the way science seems to follow its own internal logic while participating centrally in the society in which it is embedded." Science"The juxtaposition of cultural analysis and institutional history is a refreshing change of perspective for the history of molecular biology." Rena Selya, Harvard University

Molecular biology dominates our perceptions of life, health and disease. In the postwar years, the Medical Research Council Laboratory at Cambridge was a world-renowned center of this emerging discipline; this important new study examines the development of the new science of life in the context of this remarkable institution.

In one relatively concise volume, Chadarevian gives us a thorough summary of molecular biology since World War 2. While the title says 'after', the book starts with the situation in Britain during the war, and the massive involvement of British scientists. Afterwards, the story looks at the Cambridge lab in which Crick and Watson were to discover the double helix structure of DNA. You can see the prerequisites needed for their work. Especially the X ray crystallography as applied to biological samples. Several physicists who migrated their expertise to biology are mentioned. About the double helix discovery itself, there is relatively little play. It has been extensively documented elsewhere, not least by Watson himself. Many storied names grace the pages. Max Perutz, Max Delbruck and Gunther Stent prominent amongst others. Their contributions are well explained. But interspersed with all this is the ongoing funding situation, especially in Britain. Thanks in part to scientists promoting and explaining their work, there was generally keen support from the British government. The book mostly ends in the 70s. Just before the first biotech firms, which were mostly out of San Francisco. You can see that the first stage [so to speak] of molecular biology was centred on Cambridge. But during the time considered, it's basically all done in academic labs. The rise of the biotech industry would come later, and is a story still unfolding. Which by the way suggests the author might come out with a second volume, that looks at the industry.

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