

...but we become ourselves only
after it claims our own blood.

INFECTION BY MOSQUITTOES

IS NO LONGER A THEORY
BUT A PROVEN FACT



THE GREAT FEVER

1 x 60



International

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On September 13, 1900, thirty-four-year-old physician Jesse Lazear believed he was on the brink of a scientific breakthrough that would put an end to yellow fever, the worst epidemic scourge of nineteenth-century America.

Dr. Jesse Lazear, a member of the US Yellow Fever Board working in Havana, was working on a radical theory which placed the lowly mosquito at the center of one of science's most elusive riddles. Shortly after being bitten by a lab mosquito known to be infected with yellow fever, two of Lazear's co-workers had fallen ill. Encouraged by this result, the ambitious young surgeon put himself at risk, allowing an infected mosquito to bite him. In less than two weeks, after several days of delirium and black vomit, Jesse Lazear was dead.

From writer, producer and director Adriana Bosch (*Fidel Castro, Reagan, Jimmy Carter*), *The Great Fever* documents the groundbreaking research of intrepid Cuban scientist Carlos Finlay and the heroic efforts of Major Walter Reed and his medical team, some of whom—including Lazear—put their own lives on the line to eradicate yellow fever.

Jaundice, liver failure and massive bleeding—the devastating symptoms of yellow fever—heralded certain death. In 1878, an epidemic that began in New Orleans quickly spread to other states. Desperate citizens waged sanitation campaigns and helpless officials set up quarantines, but cases continued to multiply as fear and chaos devastated city upon city. The 1878 epidemic was traced back to a cargo shipment from the island of Cuba, where yellow fever was present year round.

When US troops occupied Cuba in 1900, American soldiers became vulnerable. Army officers took action and named Major Walter Reed, a US Army doctor, to head a research team bound for Havana, where, upon arriving, he added Major Jesse Lazear. The team paid a visit to Cuban scientist Carlos Finlay, who, twenty years earlier, had boldly suggested that yellow fever was spread by mosquitoes. At the time, his thesis was flatly rejected. Now, Jesse Lazear picked up where Finlay had left off. He began to conduct human experiments, using mosquitoes to transmit yellow fever from sick to healthy patients, and ultimately to himself.

This new theory faced its most important test in 1905, when two suspicious deaths in New Orleans forebode a new outbreak. Built on the swampy backwater of the Mississippi River delta, the city was a perfect test case for mosquito control methods that had proved so effective in Havana. Racing against the clock, public health officials launched a major campaign against the mosquitos, and by the first frost, just 452 deaths had been reported—a small fraction of the devastation wrought by earlier outbreaks.

The mosquito control measures that were put in place in 1905 New Orleans amounted to the United States' first major public health triumph of the twentieth century.

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CREDITS

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