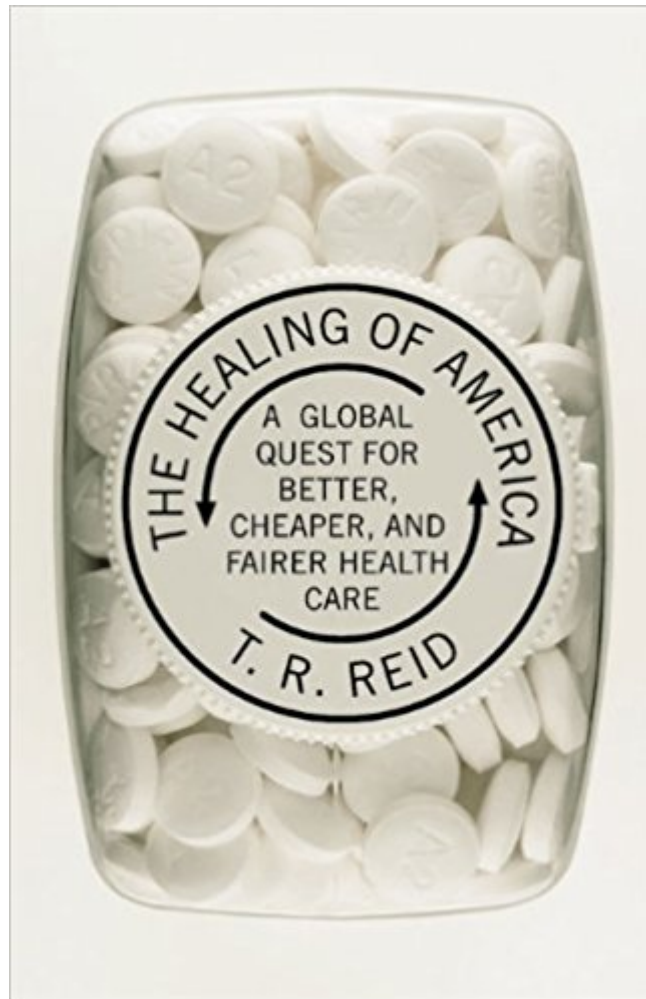


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# The Healing Of America: A Global Quest For Better, Cheaper, And Fairer Health Care



## Synopsis

Bestselling author T. R. Reid guides a whirlwind tour of successful health care systems worldwide, revealing possible paths toward U.S. reform. In *The Healing of America*, New York Times bestselling author T. R. Reid shows how all the other industrialized democracies have achieved something the United States can't seem to do: provide health care for everybody at a reasonable cost. In his global quest to find a possible prescription, Reid visits wealthy, free market, industrialized democracies like our own—including France, Germany, Japan, the U.K., and Canada—where he finds inspiration in example. Reid shares evidence from doctors, government officials, health care experts, and patients the world over, finding that foreign health care systems give everybody quality care at an affordable cost. And that dreaded monster—socialized medicine—turns out to be a myth. Many developed countries provide universal coverage with private doctors, private hospitals, and private insurance. In addition to long-established systems, Reid also studies countries that have carried out major health care reform. The first question facing these countries—and the United States, for that matter—is an ethical issue: Is health care a human right? Most countries have already answered with a resolute yes, leaving the United States in the murky moral backwater with nations we typically think of as far less just than our own. *The Healing of America* lays bare the moral question at the heart of our troubled system, dissecting the misleading rhetoric surrounding the health care debate. Reid sees problems elsewhere, too: He finds poorly paid doctors in Japan, endless lines in Canada, mistreated patients in Britain, spartan facilities in France. Still, all the other rich countries operate at a lower cost, produce better health statistics, and cover everybody. In the end, *The Healing of America* is a good news book: It finds models around the world that Americans can borrow to guarantee health care for everybody who needs it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I bought this book after reading Jacob Weisberg's review in Newsweek. It is the best thing on the subject for the following reasons: 1. It is well written even funny in places. 2. It is very informative. 3. It presents comparative data both as to health outcomes and also ways of paying for health care 4. It is non-partisan, even though by the end one wonders why we Americans are paying so much for health outcomes that are actually worse than any comparable country. 5. It is revealing as to the complexity of the US; for example, I didn't know that as many as 80 million Americans are already covered by systems nearly identical to the British or Canadian, i.e. medicaid, medicare, military, veterans and Department of Indian Affairs - who would have thought that? But 45 million others are not covered at all. Everyone else is covered, more or less, by insurance and so are the Germans, French and Japanese etc. But what a difference in the insurance systems! In the other countries you get insurance just like here EXCEPT THAT 1. you cannot be denied 2. you cannot be cancelled 3. everyone is covered and 4. your premiums are regulated by government which of course is what the entire debate is about. Because here the insurance industry is for profit and the premiums reflect that fact, the amazing fact that US health is the USA's largest industry by far, larger than the State of California, four times larger than the military, in fact US health would be the world's 8th largest country. No wonder the debate is so fierce. This excellent book sets it all out readably and comprehensively.

In 'The Healing of America' TR Reid gives a tutorial on the basic types of health care systems in place around the world, and then tries to give an evenhanded analysis of what works in these systems and what doesn't. What gives the book its teeth though is his first-hand experience of health care systems in six different countries. In his quest, Reid brings a bum shoulder to these countries to find, as he puts it, 'two cures': one for himself and one for the US health care system. There's no question something needs to be done to fix the US health care system. The idea that the richest and most technologically-advanced country would let people die because they can't get the care they need or go bankrupt because they get sick is absurd. That is why the current debate about health care reform is needed. The problem though is that it's hard to know what

we're looking at when filtered through politicians and the majority of the media coverage. They focus on the extremes, especially those opposed to reform who mischaracterize the systems in other countries as 'socialized medicine'. In this context, Reid provides a useful voice to the debate- whether you agree with his prescriptions or not. He de-stigmatizes the systems of other countries and explains why we're not as far removed from them as we think. He shows us how other countries' systems are different, but also alike. Some 'socialist' countries have private insurance and private doctors. In fact, Reid demonstrates how some countries actually have more choice than the US. In Germany for example, one can choose from hundreds of different insurance plans and go to any doctor, whereas US citizens are generally limited to one employer's plan and only 'in-network' doctors. Some countries, like Britain, have government-run hospitals but private GPs. Some are single-payer, but most have multiple payers. Some plans are funded by private insurance, some by a government-run insurance fund, and others by general taxation. What is striking about these different variants though is that while some Americans rip these other systems, we here in America have forms of each of them. Medicare is run like Canada's system. Veterans are put through a system like Britain's. Americans with employee-sponsored plans are in a similar system as people in Germany. The difference is that those other countries provide health care more economically and more effectively than we do in America. Why? The answer lies in what they have in common. They all have a single, unified system, which allows administrative efficiencies. Ours is fragmented and riddled with administrative costs and perverse economic incentives. Their programs are all non-profit, so there's no need for insurance to cut coverage to maintain the bottom line as ours do. And they all provide universal coverage, which provides the economic incentive for preventative medicine. As Reid points out, the first question we need to ask ourselves is, do we think people should die due to lack of coverage? Or should people go bankrupt because they get sick? These are moral questions, and the US is the only rich developed nation that has so far said yes to them. Reid does gloss over some things though. He pays little attention to costs, seeing it as a problem solved once the profit motive is gone, universal coverage is agreed upon, and government price controls are in place. Besides showing a complete lack of economic understanding, this also skirts the fact that costs in other countries are also increasing. He does point this out but only says that their costs are so much lower than America's they can afford to let them rise. (For a more intelligent and nuanced analysis of the problem of cost in the US health care system and a unique idea for reform, see the article by David Goldhill in the September issue of 'The Atlantic'.) He also polarizes the debate (like it needs more polarization) by getting into the 'health care as a civil right' question. He was better-off sticking with his stronger, moral point because it's not at all inconsistent

to think health care is NOT a civil right, but still have the moral conviction that everyone should have coverage. By putting these in black and white terms, he sounds like the European Socialist Liberal he had managed to avoid sounding like up to that point. Still, assuming he hasn't misrepresented anything in this book or provided inaccurate facts, this is important stuff. The health care debate is vitally important and I think every American should be armed with as much information as possible. That said, many articles by Reid and about this book have been published that will give you the basic facts outlined here. For most people, those articles should be enough. Only shell out for the book if you're interested in a deep dive on the subject.

I can't vouch for the accuracy of all of Reid's accounts, but as an American expat who lived in Germany and the UK for a total of 28 years, I can confirm that his descriptions of the health care systems in those two countries are both accurate and fair. The timing of this book is uncanny. Everyone who cares one whit about health care in the US should read it... and LISTEN to what it has to tell us.

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