

KIRKUS REVIEWS

Pandemic Musings

by Denis O'Neill

One man's day-by-day reflections on the first year of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

In this slim debut work of nonfiction, Connecticut native O'Neill presents his reactions to a rapidly changing world as the coronavirus pandemic took hold. The earliest of these self-described "musings" takes place in January 2020, when the emergency was still emerging; readers now accustomed to fatality numbers in the hundreds of thousands will be jarred when O'Neill recalls April 22, 2020, when "Covid-19 threaten(ed) to run up a body count beyond the 59,000 who gave their lives in Vietnam." One will be left in no doubt where the author stands on President Trump's disastrous mishandling of the pandemic response; for instance, he immediately notes the president's reluctance to let passengers off a plague-stricken cruise ship because it would make Trump's "numbers" look bad. As the president offered inaccurate information about the virus right up until his defeat in the 2020 election, there's plenty for O'Neill to criticize. Drawing on his lifelong interest in politics, he contrasts Trump with the president of his boyhood, John F. Kennedy. "Politics seemed noble," he reflects of those early days. "It felt natural and right that with good leadership, America's best days were still in front of her." Indeed, despite the title, O'Neill spends the bulk of this book reflecting on politics, expressing his slim hope for a presidential election victory for U.S. Sen. Joe Biden and his abundant disgust with Trump, which is certain to alienate die-hard supporters of the former president. "In a country of 330 million people," he asks at one point, "how did one of our least qualified citizens rise to the top?" Still, those readers whose politics align with the author's will enjoy these sections, and O'Neill offers equally engaging commentary on the rest of the pandemic year.

An intelligent and occasionally caustic survey of recent events.