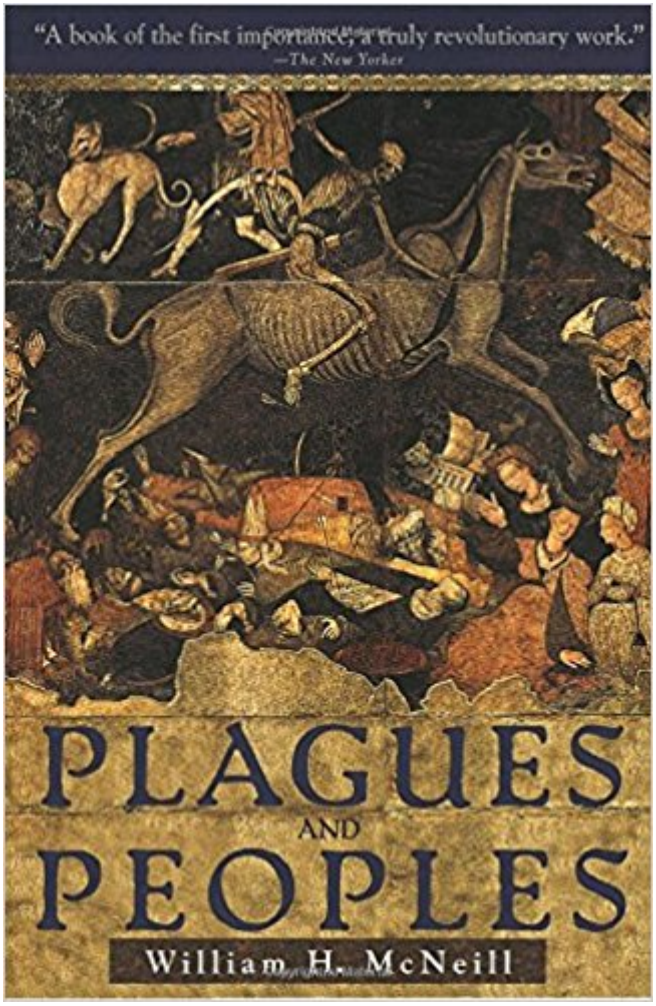
Plagues And Peoples



Synopsis

Upon its original publication, Plagues and Peoples was an immediate critical and popular success, offering a radically new interpretation of world history as seen through the extraordinary impact--political, demographic, ecological, and psychological--of disease on cultures. From the conquest of Mexico by smallpox as much as by the Spanish, to the bubonic plague in China, to the typhoid epidemic in Europe, the history of disease is the history of humankind. With the identification of AIDS in the early 1980s, another chapter has been added to this chronicle of events, which William McNeill explores in his new introduction to this updated editon.Thought-provoking, well-researched, and compulsively readable, Plagues and Peoples is that rare book that is as fascinating as it is scholarly, as intriguing as it is enlightening. "A brilliantly conceptualized and challenging achievement" (Kirkus Reviews), it is essential reading, offering a new perspective on human history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

No small themes for historian William McNeill: he is a writer of big, sweeping books, from The Rise of the West to The History of the World. Plagues and Peoples considers the influence of infectious diseases on the course of history, and McNeill pays special attention to the Black Death of the 13th and 14th centuries, which killed millions across Europe and Asia. (At one point, writes McNeill, 10,000 people in Constantinople alone were dying each day from the plague.) With the new crop of plagues and epidemics in our own time, McNeill’s quiet assertion that "in any effort to understand

what lies ahead the role of infectious disease cannot properly be left out of consideration" takes on new significance.

McNeill's highly acclaimed work is a brilliant and challenging account of the effects of disease on human history. His sophisticated analysis and detailed grasp of the subject make this book fascinating reading. By the author of The Rise Of The West.

There does seem to be a correlation between the years that a writer immerses her or himself in the subject matter and the sheer number of sources cited. And then there are those writers that expand their own horizons and encompass and become proficient in many different subjects. Well, this book was deftly written by a writer of history that has also become proficient in biology. There's simply no other way to come up with the wonderfully focused hypothesis that there are not only microparasites in the environment, but also macroparasites such as governments and, well, business and real estate owners. It is our job to try to successfully negotiate our lives while keeping both forms at bay. In the past, however, and I'm talking from around 500 BC to near-present, microparasites weren't known about. When the plague--termed Pasturella pestis in the book instead of the more typically named Yrsinia pestis today--occurred it wasn't known to be a microparasite. No, it was blamed on many things, god, Jews, sin, any scapegoat really, until around 1850 in some places, though even today you'll find misdirection in knowledgeless pockets.What is more, the author took great pains to research how often and what impact microparasite had on the course of human history, flushing out the 100s of times it occured in China alone from recorded history in 320 or so BC, based upon the work of Joseph Cha. So maybe many of the wars that were won by the few over the many were done so because the many were already being microparasitized and couldn't defend themselves. Too, the real winner has been the microparasites, having killed far more than any war, though they killed mostly when introduced to a population that hadn't seen them before, for a "proper" parasite will learn to not kill in order to best survive. And that is where we are today, at an equilibrium of population with both macro and microparasites, thanks no doubt to medical science enabling our uneasy relationship.Highly recommended... - lc

Germs and PlaguesWilliam H. McNeill, Plagues and Peoples, New York: Anchor Books, 1976, 1998 How did the Spanish Conquistadores, with a few hundred men, conquer the Aztecs and IncasÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •developed civilizations numbering in the millions? How did Cortez overcome Montezuma and the Aztecs in Mexico? How did Pizarro conquer the Incas of Peru? How did the

religions of the Indians of South America disappear so rapidly, and why did millions accept Christianity? The lopsided impact of infectious diseases upon the Indians of South America offered a key to the military and cultural conquest, and that is the key that McNeill uses to examine the whole course of human history. This is the story of what happens when people who have grown immune to a disease contact a population that has never been exposed to that disease. The consequences can be disastrous. This book aims to bring the history of exposure to infectious disease into the realm of historical explanation by showing how patterns of disease have affected human affairs. McNeill begins with a few key concepts, and the first is disease and parasites. We are parasites, and host for parasites. We host microparasitesÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •viruses, bacteria and multi-celled creatures. Some make us sick and can kill us; some are combatted and consumed by our white blood cells; and others just hang around in our bodies, not causing much or any trouble, but perhaps waiting for the opportunity to jump to another organism where their effect can be much more dangerous. We are also subject to macroparasites. Once we might have had to worry about being eaten by wolves or lions, and later, the conqueror would allow us to live and produce food, and weÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢d be allowed to keep enough to sustain ourselves, but he would get the rest. You can see we still have macroparasites. In England in the 18th century many cattle and sheep had been fenced into separate fields, so that there was much less exchange of diseases with other herds. Not only did this produce healthier livestock, but it greatly reduced diseases transmitted from livestock to humans. At this time farmers were learning of more productive farming techniques, including growing alfalfa for livestock. This resulted in greatly improved food production, and humans were eating more protein, which led to production of more protein antibodies to fight disease more effectively. Because French farmers had not yet learned to fence off herds, these results did not appear there until the 19th century. McNeill shows us how, as men were able to move more swiftly across the globe, how easy it was to spread germs. Marching armies were especially effective at spreading disease. So were the millions making the annual hajj pilgrimage from all over the Moslem world to Mecca, and back again. Disease often killed many thousands of an invading army. When Alexander the GreatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s army reached India it was disease, not opposing troops, who stopped his world conquest.Bubonic Plague symptoms Bubonic plague has been a killer over many centuries, but it was not until 1894 when doctors discovered the connection between burrowing rodents, fleas and humans, transmitting Pasturella pestis, that eradication could become effective. The disease spread time and again by Mongol horsemen raiding in China and Europe, carrying a few infected rats in their saddlebags. Chinese records show several times in the middle ages when 90% of a province would be wiped out by the plague. At

some periods in history there were centuries without outbreaks of the disease, as it traveled within colonies of burrowing rodentsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â•squirrels, rats, marmots and the like. Napoleon sent troops to suppress an uprising in Santo Domingo in 1802, but yellow fever and other tropical diseases destroyed a force of 33,000 men, and led him to give up his visions of empire in America and sell the Louisiana Purchase to America. Until the 19th century, McNeill writes, cities were too polluted to sustain themselves. As city-dwellers died, they were replaced by healthy people from the countryside. Only in the 1800s did the balance shift, so that city-dwellers, who had become immune to diseases, made the populations of cities self-sustaining. Cholera is an interesting story. This disease is spread by people drinking the same water that others have used for their sewage, and as cities began to build sewers that transported wastewater to areas where it would not affect the drinking water supply, cholera began to become less of a threat. Note that many huge cities in Africa and South America today lack sanitary facilities for millions who live in shantytowns around the central city, and cholera is only one of the diseases always threatening them.
McNeillÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s description of efforts to control smallpox leaves oneÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s head spinning, because it starts in the middle and works forward and then backward. To simplify, a wandering wise man from India taught the Chinese a method for inoculation against smallpox in the 11th century. Inoculation began in England in 1721, and the royal family were inoculated the next year. This involved inserting a small bit of the disease under the skin, and usually created a slight dose of the disease, but then immunized the patient. In 1798 an alert English country doctor, Edward Jenner, noticed that milkmaids, who worked around cattle and were exposed to cowpox, attained immunity to smallpox. Cowpox, much less harmful to humans, was provided as an inoculation, and this began the virtual elimination of the disease. This book, initially published in 1976, includes a new, 1998 forward which discusses the then newest epidemic, that of AIDS. McNeillÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s view of the human situation isnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t all that encouraging. We face microparasites within and macroparasites above, around and beyond. As soon as we become immune to smallpox or clean up our lives to protect against cholera, along comes AIDS, Ebola, or Zika; or a new macroparasite like a new tax, or a higher rent, or some other problem.-end-

Excellent summary of the eternal battle between humans and microbes. Reviews the why and how of all the great plagues and the role they played in human history. A little ot of date, but there is no newer version.

Plagues and Peoples Peoples and Cultures of East Africa (Peoples and Cultures of Africa) Peoples

and Cultures of Southern Africa (Peoples and Cultures of Africa) The Moundbuilders: Ancient Peoples of Eastern North America (Ancient Peoples and Places) Man and Microbes: Disease and Plagues in History and Modern Times Viruses, Plagues, and History: Past, Present and Future Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues, Updated with a New Preface Get Well Soon: HistoryÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Worst Plagues and the Heroes Who Fought Them Seven Modern Plagues: and How We Are Causing Them Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues, Updated Edition With a New Preface Missing Microbes: How the Overuse of Antibiotics Is Fueling Our Modern Plagues Outbreak! Plagues That Changed History Science Comics: Plagues: The Microscopic Battlefield The Power of Plagues Plagues & Poxes: The Impact of Human History on Epidemic Disease The Peoples and Politics of the Far East: Travels and Studies in the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese Colonies, Siberia, China, Japan, Korea, Siam and Malaya Righting Canada's Wrongs: Residential Schools: The Devastating Impact on Canada's Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Findings and Calls for Action Red road through Asia;: A journey by the Arctic ocean to Siberia, Central Asia and Armenia; with an account of the peoples now living in those countries under the hammer and sickle, Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples "Strange Lands and Different Peoples": Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Guatemala (The Civilization of the American Indian Series)