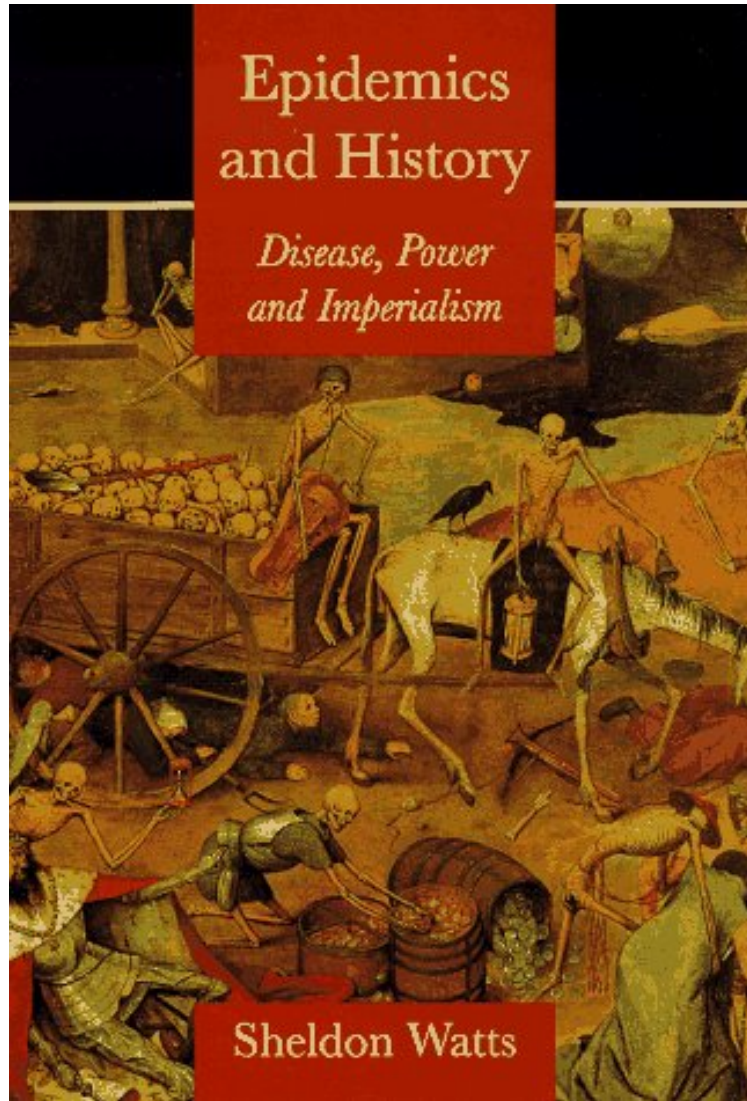


(Read free ebook) Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and Imperialism

Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and Imperialism

Dr. Sheldon Watts

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Dr. Sheldon Watts : Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and Imperialism before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and Imperialism:

25 of 25 people found the following review helpful. An excellent treatise, marred by lapses into indignationBy A CustomerThis work is impressive in its breadth of scholarship, but the author's personal rancor at Europeans' ill treatment of the rest of the world detracts from the narrative. The descriptions of the decimation of the Taino, the Aztecs, Inca and others within a century by the Spanish is truly horrific. Repeatedly referring to the Spanish as

"terrorists" weakens, rather than reinforces the point. They were not terrorists: they were behaving as Europeans historically have. The author's succinct explanation of the reasons for the Spanish attitudes toward New World peoples makes his subsequent indignation with their actions curious, to say the least. Similarly, his explanation of malaria and yellow fever is extensive, but his indignation at Europeans in response to the diseases detracts from his scholarship. That Europeans are arrogant, naive, biased, pig-headed, murderous and short-sighted should come as no revelation to anyone reading this book. Other peoples in the world are too, but they didn't all have the opportunity to impose their will on others. To complement this work, Diamond's *Guns Germs and Steel*, and MacNeill's *The Rise of the West, and Plagues and Peoples* cover much of the same ground and posit theories how Europeans came to be in a position to impose their will on much of the rest of the world. Overall, a very interesting book, which would be better without these occasional, distracting polemics.

58 of 68 people found the following review helpful. Anti-imperialist screed
By Kenton A. Hoover
Sheldon Watts took us on a journey of exploration of a gigantic subject, followed his political views and lost his way. This book wants to put such a strong spin on disease as an element of conquest, that it neglects and distorts too many facts. You can usually find the distortions by noting which paragraphs contain statements that treat some previously unknown fact as common knowledge and then not finding an end note providing some references. I also noted that most of the sources for the book were less than ten years old, and were often tertiary. Sheldon Watts also gets his biological facts wrong on many occasions, usually when trying to underline some action he feels is imperialist. His most unpardonable sin has to be attributing current knowledge to figures who had no such understanding, and then judging their actions using that assumption. For example, he assumes that since people understood that smallpox was communicable, that they had to understand that all diseases were communicable. This was long before Koch or even Snow. And Sheldon Watts does this even though he acknowledges that medical knowledge was effectively non-existent until the mid-1800s. Unless of course it is folk wisdom that he is talking about, which gets a pass, no matter how silly. If you are a Powerful White Man, on the other hand, you are assumed to be omniscient. If you want a more limited treatment about the subject of diseases and public thought, I suggest that you try "The Cholera Years" by Charles E. Rosenberg. If you want a good treatment of multiple diseases and their biological progression around the world, try "Plagues" by Christopher Wills. Those two books together will cost less than this one, and you'll learn more. And they are far, far more readable.

4 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Reality but defective in some aspects
By hfezyi@marun.edu.tr
The book has a very attractive and rather unknown subject. The analysis of different diseases and interactions between social powers, religion and the emergence of diseases is very interesting. But the information given about the Eastern and Islamic world is confined to Egypt. The author makes comments only relying on the Egyptian data and this is rather weak. But as a whole the book gives very useful information and shows that all these medical advances now and in history are not so innocent as in most cases economic concerns suppress humanity.

A wide ranging study of the great epidemic scourges of humanity - plague, leprosy, smallpox, syphilis, cholera and yellow fever/malaria - over the last six centuries. Sheldon Watts, applies his perspective to the study of global disease, exploring the connections between the movement of epidemics and the manifestations of imperial power in the Americas, Asia, Africa and in European homelands. He shows how the perceptions of whom a disease targeted changed over time and effected various political and medical responses. He argues that not only did western medicine fail to cure the diseases that its own expansion engendered, but that imperial medicine was in fact an agent and tool of empire. Watts examines the relationship between the pre-modern medical profession and such epidemic disasters as the plague in western Europe and the Middle East; leprosy in the medieval west and in the 19th-century tropical world; the spread of smallpox to the new world in the age of exploration; syphilis and nonsexual diseases in Europe's connection with Asia; cholera in India during British rule; and malaria in the Atlantic basin during the eras of slavery and social Darwinism. He investigates in detail the relation between violent environmental changes and disease, and between disease and society, both in the material sphere and in the minds and spirit of rulers and those who were ruled. This book is an account of the way diseases - arising through chance, through reckless environmental change engineered by man, or through a combination of each - were interpreted in western Europe and in the colonized world.