

THE CHOLERA YEARS: THE UNITED STATES IN 1832, 1849, AND 1866 BY CHARLES E. ROSENBERG

Charles E. Rosenberg

THE Cholera Years

With a new Afterword



The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866

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From the Back Cover

Cholera was the classic epidemic disease of the nineteenth century, as the plague had been for the fourteenth. Its defeat was a reflection not only of progress in medical knowledge but of enduring changes in American social thought. Rosenberg has focused his study on New York City, the most highly developed center of this new society.

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"A major work of interpretation of medical and social thought . . . this volume is also to be commended for its skillful, absorbing presentation of the background and the effects of this dread disease."—I.B. Cohen, *New York Times*

"The *Cholera Years* is a masterful analysis of the moral and social interest attached to epidemic disease, providing generally applicable insights into how the connections between social change, changes in knowledge and changes in technical practice may be conceived."—Steven Shapin, *Times Literary Supplement*

"In a way that is all too rarely done, Rosenberg has skillfully interwoven medical, social, and intellectual history to show how medicine and society interacted and changed during the 19th century. The history of medicine here takes its rightful place in the tapestry of human history."—John B. Blake, *Science*

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Five Stars

By margaret dardess

A lively recounted, well researched account of the U.S. during three cholera epidemics.

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Cholera amongst us today

By Brian D. Rudert

Raising my children in Central America when the sixth world cholera pandemic reached the shores of this continent heightened my awareness as to existence of this mysterious disease. My children would bring home their cholera awareness materials from school that emphasized hand washing and clean water. Later on, I researched an incident in 1852 when Ulysses S. Grant and the U.S. 4th Infantry were devastated by cholera when passing through Panama on their way to California. However, it wasn't until I read Rosenberg's book that I understood how horrible a death from cholera was and yet how easy it is nowadays to treat. Rosenberg brings out so many interesting aspects of the impact of cholera on public health and the fact that the disease has only been known in the Western world for a little over 200 years. Most people think cholera is biblical. The book is an easy read for a layman and too bad it appears to be mostly used as a text book in college.

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

How Cholera changed America

By Valorie T.

In the Republic era of America, people were assaulted daily by their own visions of success, failure, the expectations and weaknesses of a still developing concept of democracy, poverty, and illness. One such illness, Cholera, infected America three times during this period: 1832, 1849, and 1866. In America, "Cholera represented a constant and randomly reoccurring stimulus against which the varying reactions and systems of Americans could be judged", and it caused gradual changes in social attitudes, government, religious thought, and medicine as people tried to understand and cope with the disease. Historians have recently given little attention to defining and then writing about the social changes brought about by cholera, both as a process and its final result. It is part of history's recent interest in social aspects such as family and school, which medicine is a part of because the two are linked by every day life concerns.

The Cholera Years is an interesting and easy to read book. One of its strengths lies in its readability and in how it engages the reader through primary sources. Historical books that tell stories and relate true life accounts and words are more interesting than those that simply move from one fact to the next. Also, Rosenberg is very organized in his presentation of information. The sections, chopped up by cholera year, follow the same patterns as far as how information is addressed. As a result, though we are reading from one year to the next, the progressions of society and thought are easy to follow and connect together. It actually made more sense this way than if Rosenberg had approached the book topically, which would have jumped around and only confused. Unfortunately, as a weakness, Rosenberg is very repetitive. A lot of information and points are stressed repeatedly throughout the book, and in that way it sort of loses focus a few times.

Rosenberg gives an annotated bibliography at the end of his book, which lists aids, manuscripts, public documents, newspapers, printed medical documents, other printed material, and secondary sources consulted. He does make note in his section on printed material other than medical literature that he has not listed all the documents consulted because they are too numerous, but instead listed those that are most interesting or relevant, which he also does with newspapers. The primary sources include such documents as hospital reports, newspapers, Board of Health and committee minutes, and religious sermons. As such, we are provided with a lot of "from the mouth" accounts of cholera to support the progressions in thought and practice that Rosenberg takes us through from one outbreak to the next.

This book fits well into the genre of medical history, as well as cultural history because Cholera had a direct and distinct impact on life, the concept of a person, social equality, and medical care. You won't get the sort of copious gory details that medical history books are known for, which is a shame, but you will certainly come out of reading the book understanding a bit more how America evolved into the country it is now, and how something like one disease could shape a nation.

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