



Plagues and Peoples

William H. McNeill

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This study describes the dramatic impact of infectious diseases on the rise and fall of civilizations. Plague demoralized the Athenian Army during war, and ravaged the Roman Empire. In the 16th century smallpox was the decisive agent that allowed Cortez with only 600 men to conquer the Aztec Empire, whose subjects numbered millions. As recently as 1918-19, an epidemic of influenza claimed 21 million victims and seemed to threaten civilization itself. Diseases such as syphilis, cholera, smallpox and malaria have been devastating to humanity for centuries. This book, through an impressive accumulation of evidence, demonstrates the central role of pestilence in human affairs and the extent to which it has changed the course of history.

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