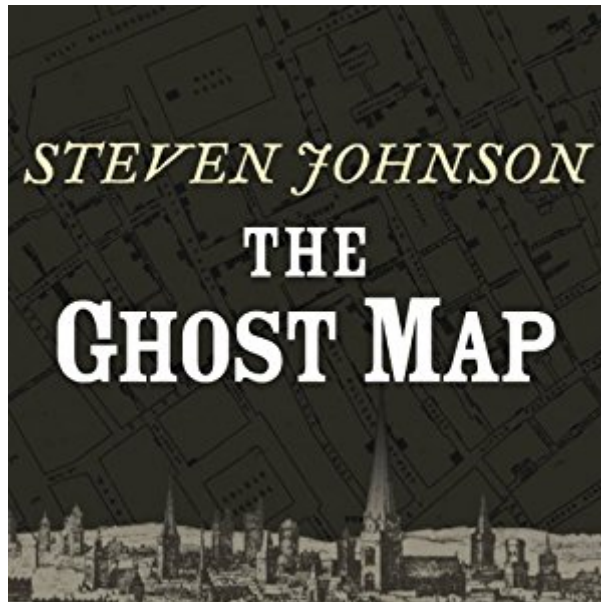




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# The Ghost Map



## Synopsis

A thrilling historical account of the worst cholera outbreak in Victorian London-and a brilliant exploration of how Dr. John Snow's solution revolutionized the way we think about disease, cities, science, and the modern world. From the dynamic thinker routinely compared to Malcolm Gladwell, E. O. Wilson, and James Gleick, *The Ghost Map* is a riveting page-turner with a real-life historical hero that brilliantly illuminates the intertwined histories of the spread of viruses, rise of cities, and the nature of scientific inquiry. These are topics that have long obsessed Steven Johnson, and *The Ghost Map* is a true triumph of the kind of multidisciplinary thinking for which he's become famous-a book that, like the work of Jared Diamond, presents both vivid history and a powerful and provocative explanation of what it means for the world we live in. *The Ghost Map* takes place in the summer of 1854. A devastating cholera outbreak seizes London just as it is emerging as a modern city: more than 2 million people packed into a ten-mile circumference, a hub of travel and commerce, teeming with people from all over the world, continually pushing the limits of infrastructure that's outdated as soon as it's updated. Dr. John Snow-whose ideas about contagion had been dismissed by the scientific community-is spurred to intense action when the people in his neighborhood begin dying. With enthralling suspense, Johnson chronicles Snow's day-by-day efforts, as he risks his own life to prove how the epidemic is being spread. When he creates the map that traces the pattern of outbreak back to its source, Dr. Snow didn't just solve the most pressing medical riddle of his time. He ultimately established a precedent for the way modern city-dwellers, city planners, physicians, and public officials think about the spread of disease and the development of the modern urban environment. *The Ghost Map* is an endlessly compelling and utterly gripping account of that London summer of 1854, from the microbial level to the macrourban-theory level-including, most important, the human level. --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Through the London epidemic of Cholera in 1854, the author presents the Victorian era science, public opinions and participating individuals in the pursuit of stopping the epidemic. The book is about the urbanization of society and subsequent public health challenges, and how the experience shaped the management of urban governing through science, sociology and engineering and the future ramifications of urban issues in the time of global dangers. It is one of those exemplary non fiction, history/science/technology books that are entertaining with interesting participants, and their opponents--personal, political and environmental--, but in the end the triumph against all odds, thanks to some luck, but a whole lot of tenacity and scientific and personal integrity and faith. There are many lessons, one of which is what Susan Sontag wrote about as well, the malice of attaching morality to disease--here, for example phrenology, or internal constitution as a factor, classism, or the treatment of people with AIDS during the Reagan administration in our time. I found the only problem with this book is that his Epilogue is way too long than necessary, and he repeats same issues that have been discussed already.

Author Steven Johnson ("Everything Bad is Good For You") tells a fascinating tale about a pump handle in London. "A pump handle?" you might ask? Believe it or not, this is a pivotal item in the first step toward containment of communicable diseases. His opening chapter "The Night-Soil Men" describes an 1854 London, with a hard-scrabble recycling system which very nearly matches our own, teaches us how a city worked, as an organic creature, profitable, dangerous and highly prone to disease, illness and death. Our own system, more sanitary and wasteful, could learn a few lessons from certain elements from that time. We also learn of the inventions in Victorian England which brought us indoor plumbing and septic tanks (the sewer systems were storm-water drainage for the city, not sewerage disposal). Community water pumps were common and a curious Victorian pays attention when a cholera epidemic threatens the population in 1854. Author Johnson describes in great detail the occupants of the various domiciles in a specific neighborhood and their connection to an outbreak. This book does NOT spare the powers-that-be and their actions as their

citizens begin to die, but he also draws an important link to a mapmaker (yes, I said "mapmaker!") who approached the calamity from a different point of view. A vital episode in humankind's evolution, he shows us how we now address disease control and what tools we have built from these humble beginnings. This is a great, great book which I quote all the time. (I also loan it out...sorry, .)

This would be a five star book if the last 30 pages hadn't drifted into a conversation on nuclear weapons that is only tangentially related to the book itself. Anyone who has ever taken an epidemiology class has heard of John Snow and the Broad Street Pump, but this was a much more detailed account. In the same spirit of the Microbe Hunters, Steven Johnson puts his readers in the mind of the subjects. The quotes are real the thoughts inferred, but the story comes to life in a way a more traditional biographical or timeline approach can never do. Whether you care about cholera outbreaks in Victorian London or not, this is an interesting story about two determined men, public health, and how much city life has and hasn't changed.

This is one of the most disappointing books I've ever purchased. I am a fan of epidemiological case studies and historical accounts, but this book falls short. It reads like a research paper with no citations. The author repeatedly puts forth questionable theories (musings?) as reasons why the characters in the book think or do things a certain way, or why diseases spread in a particular manner, and spends a lot of time repeating himself and re-explaining his claims. The tone overall is very lecture-y. I can't believe this book received so many positive reviews. Perhaps if you don't have a background in science the questionable nature of the explanations in this book would be less obvious, but it just didn't work for me.

“What in the world can we do with all of this s\*\*\*?” That was the question of the day for two million 19th century Londoners. The night soil men proved ill equipped to keep up with removing the volumes of human excrement overflowing from cesspools and rising in basements of the Soho and Golden Square neighborhoods. It was clear London needed a new sewage system. Opening the pages of this most impressive account of sleuthing the source of the cholera outbreak was simply fascinating. Reverend Henry Whitehead and Dr. John Snow, two strangers of different backgrounds, joined together by circumstance shared valuable information and expertise. Independently each spent countless of hours interviewing, recording, and analyzing all collected data. The scientific mind of Dr. Snow compiled a map indicating the location and number of deaths therein. Whitehead as a trusted, respected local was key in turning the made up

minds of city agencies who stubbornly clung to the idea the disease originated in the foul, smelly air to accepting the actual catalyst for the outbreak. This is really an outstanding detective story very well told. A history lesson if you will. The facts, players and uncanny elusiveness of this indiscriminate killer called cholera progressed systematically without the bog down of boring statistics. The author skillfully carries history into our modern times with glimpses into our foreseeable future. A notable writing achievement.

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