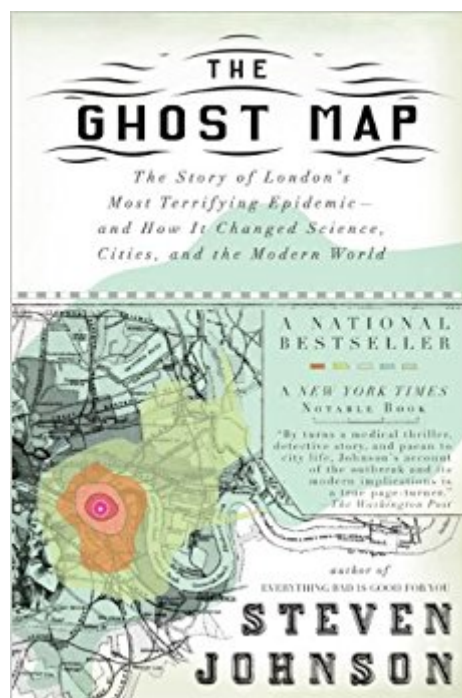




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# The Ghost Map: The Story Of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, And The Modern World



## Synopsis

A National Bestseller, a New York Times Notable Book, and an Entertainment Weekly Best Book of the Year It's the summer of 1854, and London is just emerging as one of the first modern cities in the world. But lacking the infrastructure-garbage removal, clean water, sewers-necessary to support its rapidly expanding population, the city has become the perfect breeding ground for a terrifying disease no one knows how to cure. As the cholera outbreak takes hold, a physician and a local curate are spurred to action-and ultimately solve the most pressing medical riddle of their time. In a triumph of multidisciplinary thinking, Johnson illuminates the intertwined histories of the spread of disease, the rise of cities, and the nature of scientific inquiry, offering both a riveting history and a powerful explanation of how it has shaped the world we live in.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. On August 28, 1854, working-class Londoner Sarah Lewis tossed a bucket of soiled water into the cesspool of her squalid apartment building and triggered the deadliest outbreak of cholera in the city's history. In this tightly written page-turner, Johnson (*Everything Bad Is Good for You*) uses his considerable skill to craft a story of suffering, perseverance and redemption that echoes to the present day. Describing a city and culture experiencing explosive growth, with its attendant promise and difficulty, Johnson builds the story around physician John Snow. In the face of a horrifying epidemic, Snow (pioneering developer of surgical anesthesia) posited the then radical theory that cholera was spread through contaminated water rather than through miasma, or smells

in the air. Against considerable resistance from the medical and bureaucratic establishment, Snow persisted and, with hard work and groundbreaking research, helped to bring about a fundamental change in our understanding of disease and its spread. Johnson weaves in overlapping ideas about the growth of civilization, the organization of cities, and evolution to thrilling effect. From Snow's discovery of patient zero to Johnson's compelling argument for and celebration of cities, this makes for an illuminating and satisfying read. B&w illus. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In books such as *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software*, Steven Johnson neatly draws connections between seemingly unconnected aspects of life; think of James Burke in the digital age. *The Ghost Map* is no different in applying a 21st-century sensibility to a 19th-century cholera epidemic. According to critics, Johnson makes a single tactical error in the last pages, where he attempts to link the events he describes to too many other contemporary historical trends while ignoring some real-world realities. Regardless, the story is in capable hands, and the lives of individuals and a culture on the cusp of technological and medical advance resonates with readers 150 years later. Copyright © 2004 Phillips & Nelson Media, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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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