Germs, Genes, Civilization: How Epidemics Shaped Who We Are Today

David P. Clark
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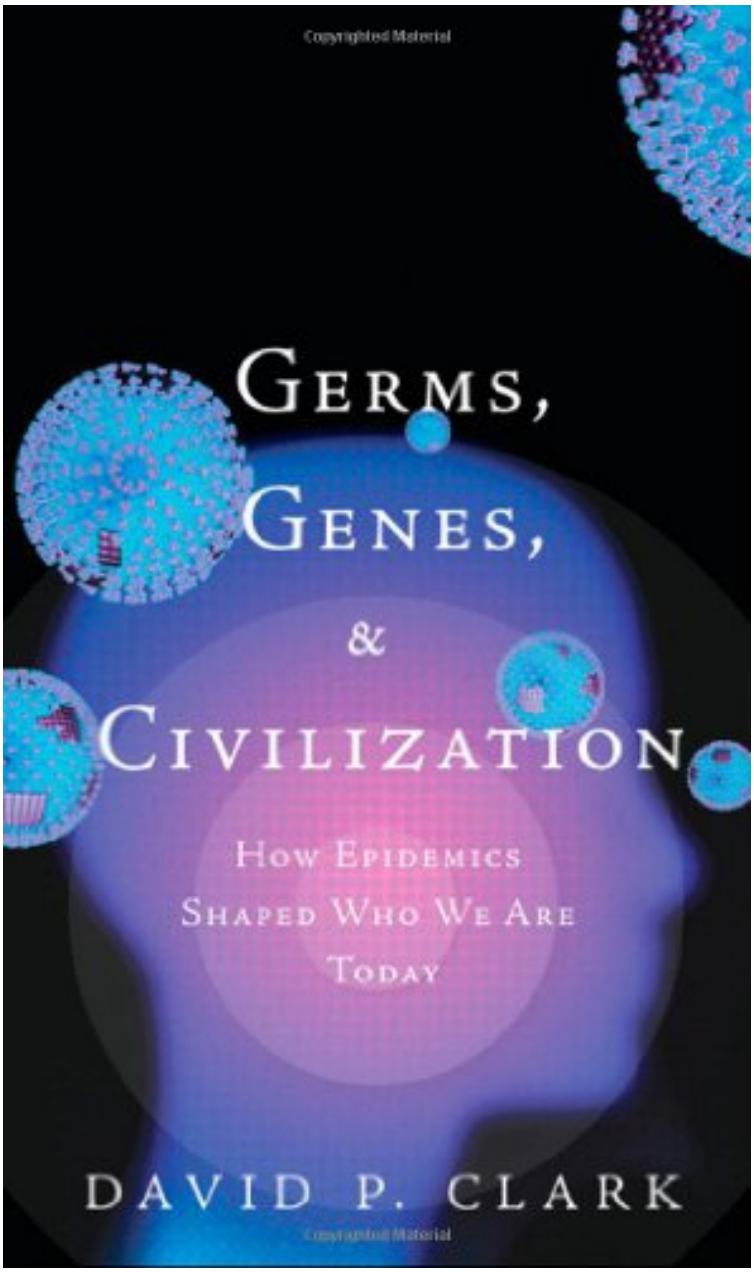

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David P. Clark : Germs, Genes, Civilization: How Epidemics Shaped Who We Are Today before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Germs, Genes, Civilization: How

Epidemics Shaped Who We Are Today:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting topicBy J. OakesThis was an interesting book. The author does a good job in describing not only the basics of disease, transmission, and genetic mutation, but also the history of various diseases and plagues that have affected mankind throughout history. I was intrigued by the author's hypothesis that diseases have played a larger role in shaping human history than warfare or economics, and while I'm not fully convinced, it's easy to see that the effects of disease have been overlooked by many historians.There are two things I didn't like about the book. First, it tended to be very repetitive. Information was put forward, almost in the same form, again and again, as though the author had not yet mentioned it. It's almost as though the eleven chapters were written separately and them complied into a book. A good editing of the book could fix this. Second, it was quite obvious that the author disdains religion in general. In particular, the chapter on religion and disease didn't seem to fit in with the rest of the book - it just seemed to be a place to grind the ax against religion. There were many little jabs against religion scattered throughout the book, which detracts from the author's main argument.Overall, I did enjoy this book, and would recommend it to anyone interested in history or diseases in general.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. No wonder religion is in our genes...By oldcamanMany thoughtful reviews here. To me the most impressive part of the book is its very persuasive presentation of the role of religion (mostly in the past but still very much with us) in understanding and treating infectious diseases.Not that prayers ever cured any infectious (or other) disease but it certainly looked that way for the ones who survived. Did natural selection took place favoring 'believers' over non-believers? As the author documents, the common sense of some 'religious' practices (basically improving hygiene and segregating the sick) may have been helpful regardless of their 'supernatural' origin.To be human means, among other things, is to understand WHY things (not only diseases) are happening. For most of the existence of our species correct explanations (mostly science) did not exist. So, religion in a general sense - many varieties of it - substituted in the past and for a very large number of people it still does.Not much we, a small minority of agnostics, can do about it. It is in our genes and there may not be a natural selection to increase our numbers. We may feel superior (good for us...) but we will die just like anyone else from mostly circulatory diseases or cancer. No natural selection here.The author apparently likes cats and so do I. Will it prolong our procreative lives? Certainly not. The author is not even married...3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Changed the way I view historyBy Forrest ChristianI expected this book to read much like a slightly less dense biology lecture but that I might slog through a quarter of it. Instead, it's a clearly written book that easily explains the genetic/biology stuff while bringing in the Big Picture historical changes brought about by infections. The idea is pretty surprising: infections gave rise to historical changes and trends, and that without understanding them you can't understand how civilizations rise and fall. It's one of those books that change the way that you see the world.The lackings of this book -- it does need a better editor and there aren't any footnotes -- are nothing compared to the author's ability to explain what is really a wildly difficult topic in clear prose for the average reader. Footnotes in a book like this would probably have been distracting, although I would have appreciated endnotes; the editing issues are mostly repetitions that could have been smoothed over better and not irritating failures of explanation. Most experts can't write like this, can't explain these big concepts in plain language, which is why so many of these types of books are written by science journalists. Clark pulls it off extremely well.Highly recommended.

In Germs, Genes and Civilization, Dr. David Clark tells the story of the microbe-driven epidemics that have repeatedly molded our human destinies. You'll discover how your genes have been shaped through millennia spent battling against infectious diseases. You'll learn how epidemics have transformed human history, over and over again, from ancient Egypt to Mexico, the Romans to Attila the Hun. You'll learn how the Black Death epidemic ended the Middle Ages, making possible the Renaissance, western democracy, and the scientific revolution. Clark demonstrates how epidemics have repeatedly shaped not just our health and genetics, but also our history, culture, and politics. You'll even learn how they may influence religion and ethics, including the ways they may help trigger cultural cycles of puritanism and promiscuity. Perhaps most fascinating of all, Clark reveals the latest scientific and philosophical insights into the interplay between microbes, humans, and society - and previews what just might come next.

From Publishers WeeklyClark (Molecular Biology Made Simple and Fun) argues that microscopic bacteria, viruses, and fungi have played an enormous and largely unacknowledged role in human history. Beginning with Attila's attack of Rome, which was likely stopped by dysentery, and continuing through modern diseases such as AIDS and the Ebola virus, Clark investigates a large number of illnesses and uncovers the ways in which they have impacted historical events. The same genes that provide humanity with protection against some endemic diseases, Clark argues, may also cause sickle cell anemia and cystic fibrosis. With wit and humor, the author turns death, an ever-heavy topic, into an engrossing exploration of the course of mankind. Though Clark's lack of references will make it difficult for readers to gain additional information, there's much of interest in this chronicle of microbes through the ages. From the Back Cover""Clear, thoughtful,

and thought-provoking, "Germs, Genes Civilization" makes the case that infectious diseases have played a major role in shaping society. Clark argues that religion, morals, and even democracy have all been influenced by the smallest and most dangerous organisms on our planet. While you may not accept every argument, you will be stimulated, entertained, and enlightened."" Samuel L. Stanley, Jr., M.D., President, Stony Brook University, and former Director of the Midwest Regional Center for Excellence in Biodefense and Emerging Infectious Diseases Research ""Clark presents an insightful explanation of the invisible history all around us. He conveys the essential facts in a riveting and engaging manner that everyone, including the nonscientist, will find exceptionally interesting and revealing."" Michael C. Thomsett, author of "The Inquisition" """Germs, Genes Civilization" is a fascinating and well-balanced account of how a wide variety of different kinds of microbes have influenced human evolution, culture, society, and even religious thought. Written for a lay audience, the relationships between genes and disease resistance and susceptibility are clearly discussed, and the book concludes with a sober assessment of what may be in store for us in the future."" Irwin W. Sherman, Professor Emeritus, University of California, Riverside, and author of "Twelve Diseases That Changed Our World" and "The Power of Plagues" The Stunning Hidden Interconnections Between Microbes and Humanity AD 452: Attila the Hun stands ready to sack Rome. No one can stop him--but he walks away. A miracle? No...dysentery. Microbes saved the Roman Empire. Nearly a millennium later, the microbes of the Black Death ended the Middle Ages, making possible the Renaissance, western democracy, and the scientific revolution. Soon after, microbes ravaged the Americas, paving the way for their European conquest. Again and again, microbes have shaped our health, our genetics, our history, our culture, our politics, even our religion and ethics. This book reveals much that scientists and cultural historians have learned about the pervasive interconnections between infectious microbes and humans. It also considers what our ongoing fundamental relationship with infectious microbes might mean for the future of the human species. The "good side" of history's worst epidemics The surprising debt we owe to killer diseases Where diseases came from... ...and where they may be going Children of pestilence: disease and civilization From Egypt to Mexico, from Rome to China STDs, sexual behavior, and culture How microbes can shape cultural cycles of puritanism and promiscuityAbout the Author David Clark was born June 1952 in Croydon, a London suburb. After winning a scholarship to Christs College, Cambridge, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1973. In 1977, he earned his Ph.D. from Bristol University for work on antibiotic resistance. David then left England for postdoctoral research at Yale and then the University of Illinois. He joined the faculty of Southern Illinois University in 1981 and is now a professor in the Microbiology Department. In 1991, he visited Sheffield University, England, as a Royal Society Guest Research Fellow. The U.S. Department of Energy funded Davids research into the genetics and regulation of bacterial fermentation from 1982 till 2007. David has published more than 70 articles in scientific journals and graduated more than 20 masters and Ph.D. students. David is the author of Molecular Biology Made Simple and Fun, now in its third edition, as well as three more serious textbooks.