

The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World

By Steven Johnson

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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and commerce, teeming with people from all over the world, continually pushing the limits of infrastructure that's outdated as soon as it's updated.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.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
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.)*
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From Bookmarks Magazine
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.

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From Booklist
Starred Review More than two million people were squeezed into 30 square miles in Victorian London, producing massive quantities of waste that, before modern public waste disposal systems, fouled both land and the Thames River. Indeed, Johnson says, "No extended description of London from that period failed to mention the stench of the city." Some, called miasmatists, believed foul odors caused disease. Many believed the lifestyles of the poor and ignorant masses made them more susceptible to illness. Thus, in late summer of 1854, when cholera began claiming poor -working-class residents of the Golden Square neighborhood, popular opinion blamed the city's excavation of a nearby burial ground. But Dr. John Snow, an anesthesia expert and consultant to the queen, and the Reverend Henry Whitehead thought the pathogen might have a different source. Their dogged efforts soon ended the deadly epidemic. They demonstrated that *Vibrio cholerae* had been contracted by drinking contaminated water from the neighborhood pump. In the short run, Snow and Whitehead saved hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lives. In the long run, their work, part of which consisted of mapping the disease's spread, resulted in efficient public waste disposal systems and disease control measures that saved millions worldwide. And that work is hardly done. *Donna Chavez*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Angela Dreiling:

In this 21st millennium, people become competitive in every single way. By being competitive now, people have do something to make these people survives, being in the middle of typically the crowded place and notice simply by surrounding. One thing that at times many people have underestimated this for a while is reading. Yes, by reading a guide your ability to survive improve then having chance to stay than other is high. For you who want to start reading the book, we give you this specific The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World book as starter and daily reading book. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

Priscilla McCreary:

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