
WHEN GERMS TRAVEL:
*Six Major Epidemics That Have
Invaded America Since 1900 and the
Fears They Have Unleashed.*

By Howard Markel. Pantheon Books.

263 pp. \$25

In 1991, when a bloody coup toppled Haiti's first democratically elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, thousands of Haitians fled the island state. Mostly they headed for the United States, in ramshackle boats unfit for the local bays, let alone the open Atlantic.

In the 1980s, the Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration both had singled out Haiti as a nation of people at high risk for HIV infection and AIDS—the only such geographic designation to appear on the high-risk lists, even though several U.S. cities had higher infection rates. In response to criticism and protests, both agencies ultimately removed Haitians from their lists, the CDC in 1985 and the FDA in 1990.

Nonetheless, President George H. W. Bush ordered the U.S. Coast Guard to intercept the boats and transfer the Haitians to Guantánamo Naval Base in Cuba. Some 12,000 refugees ended up there (thousands of others were returned to Haiti), in horrid conditions—too few and rarely emptied toilets, overcrowded housing, poor food, and reported beatings. Approximately 200 of the refugees did test positive for HIV infection; they were kept at Guantánamo for nearly two years with no anti-HIV treatment.

“The comments of President Bush’s

[Immigration and Naturalization Service] spokesman, Duke Austin, best reflected the U.S. government’s attitude at the time,” writes Howard Markel. “He refused to acknowledge the moral, ethical, and legal repercussions of imprisoning HIV-positive refugees. “They’re gonna die anyway, right?” he asked a crowd of scribbling journalists just before Christmas in 1992.”

Markel, a pediatrician and medical historian at the University of Michigan, has written a compelling book about immigration and infectious disease. Title notwithstanding, it’s less about traveling germs than about our fear of the unknown, especially the infectious unknown. In addition to U.S. policy toward AIDS, Markel examines the American response to immigrant-borne tuberculosis, typhus, cholera, bubonic plague, and trachoma (an eye infection).

He recounts one atrocity after another committed in the name of public health—Mexicans forced to bathe in a mixture of gasoline, kerosene, and vinegar because of fears of lice and typhus, the quarantine of all of San Francisco’s Chinatown for plague, the infection of immigrants as a result of unsanitary medical practices at Ellis Island. Markel’s accounts are powerful and his documentation extensive.

Time and again, Markel shows, Americans have responded to viruses and bacteria with xenophobia, racism, and moral and ethical blindness. Everyone who considers the United States a nation of civilized people should read this book.

—GERALD N. CALLAHAN

HISTORY

FINAL SOLUTIONS:
*Mass Killing and Genocide
in the 20th Century.*

By Benjamin A. Valentino. Cornell Univ. Press. 317 pp. \$29.95

“If we hope to anticipate mass killing, we must begin to think of it in the same way its perpetrators do,” writes Benjamin Valentino, a political scientist at Dartmouth College. Isn’t mass killing simply the outermost consequence of irrational group hatred? That’s the tra-

ditional perspective on it, but Valentino believes otherwise. In his view, mass killing represents a rational choice of elites to achieve or stay in political power in the face of perceived threats to their dominance.

Valentino develops his argument through eight case studies. Three fit the legal definition of genocide (the intentional destruction, in whole or in part, of a “national, ethnical, racial, or religious group”): Armenia, the Holocaust, and Rwanda. The remaining five amount to

what political scientist Barbara Harff calls “politicide,” mass killing for political reasons: Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao’s China, the Khmer Rouge’s Cambodia, Guatemala, and Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. By emphasizing cases of politicide over those of genocide, Valentino stacks the deck in favor of his politics-centered argument from the start.

He convincingly demonstrates how communist collectivization in the Soviet Union and China led to unparalleled mass murder, but his case is weaker for some of the other instances of politicide. What begins as rational political opposition to an insurgency can expose cultural fault lines of irrational ethnic hatred. In Guatemala, for example, an anti-communist counterinsurgency turned into a genocidal war against the Mayan Indians who supported the communist guerrillas. Whole Mayan villages were slaughtered, men, women, and children—yet Valentino denies the racial, ethnic aspect of the war. In Afghanistan, too, he downplays the ethnic, religious, and nationalistic roots of the resistance to Soviet occupation.

Valentino’s argument is least successful in accounting for genocide. As causes of genocide, he believes that dehumanizing attitudes, a nondemocratic government, and ethnic hatred are “secondary to deeper political and military conflicts,” though other scholars have shown them to be strong predictors. The Holocaust and the Armenian and Rwandan genocides were last resorts, Valentino contends, undertaken only after emigration and deportation failed to bring about ethnic cleansing of the respective societies. But he doesn’t adequately address why ethnic cleansing was the goal to start with; Jews, for example, were no threat to German survival except in Hitler’s fantasies. Mass killing, moreover, wasn’t a mere last resort: The Turks deported Armenians into the Syrian desert as a method of genocide, not an alternative to it, and Hutu extremists allowed no Tutsi to escape from Rwanda in 1994.

Rational means, Max Weber observed, can be adopted to achieve the most irrational ends. The meticulous planning of the death camps was a rational means to an utterly irrational end, a Jew-free Europe. Valentino minimizes the fact that the irrational ends of genocide mostly arise out of nationalism, ethnic hatred,

religious intolerance, and racism.

Despite its shortcomings, Valentino’s strategic perspective on mass killing produces an extremely useful conclusion: The best strategy for prevention is to remove those leaders likely to commit mass murder. But regime change by international intervention has not yet become an accepted norm, even to stop genocide. Some 5,500 heavy infantry with a strong mandate might have prevented the genocide in Rwanda. Instead, the United Nations withdrew. In Darfur, we see that the lessons of Rwanda haven’t yet been learned.

—GREGORY H. STANTON

**WELLINGTON’S RIFLES:
*Six Years to Waterloo with England’s
Legendary Sharpshooters.***

By Mark Urban. Walker. 351 pp. \$27

The way to the Duke of Wellington’s victories against Napoleon’s forces in Portugal and Spain in the opening years of the 19th century was paved with British defeats in the American Revolutionary War. American sharpshooters with accurate rifles took advantage of cover to torment the well-drilled British ranks and kill their officers. In response, the British deployed sharpshooting Americans who had remained loyal to the Crown. Once the war was over, many of these loyalists deemed it prudent to depart with the British. Some of them remained in the army, where they joined thoughtful British officers to build a specialized corps of riflemen.

These riflemen were to prove invaluable in the wars against Napoleon. Dressed in somber green with black buttons (rather than the shining brass ones that could give away a position), they blended with the landscape. Deployed as skirmishers in ones and twos ahead of the stolid lines of British infantry, they repeatedly decapitated French attacks by killing the officers and sniping at the gunners of the redoubtable artillery.

The French, too, had developed a new style of warfare that relied heavily on skirmishers. Their armies used their excellent and highly mobile artillery (modernized under the monarchy) to bombard the drilled ranks of their enemies, then deployed swarms of skirmishers (known as *voltigeurs*, or leapers) to torment the battered ranks further. The differ-