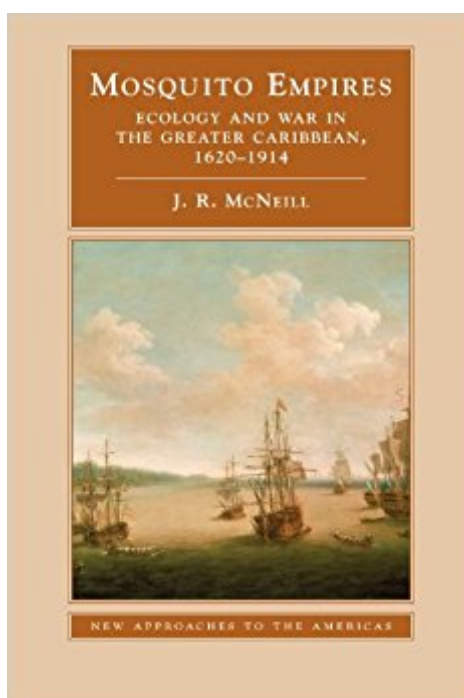


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# Mosquito Empires: Ecology And War In The Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914 (New Approaches To The Americas)



## Synopsis

This book explores the links among ecology, disease, and international politics in the context of the Greater Caribbean - the landscapes lying between Surinam and the Chesapeake - in the seventeenth through early twentieth centuries. Ecological changes made these landscapes especially suitable for the vector mosquitoes of yellow fever and malaria, and these diseases wrought systematic havoc among armies and would-be settlers. Because yellow fever confers immunity on survivors of the disease, and because malaria confers resistance, these diseases played partisan roles in the struggles for empire and revolution, attacking some populations more severely than others. In particular, yellow fever and malaria attacked newcomers to the region, which helped keep the Spanish Empire Spanish in the face of predatory rivals in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth century, these diseases helped revolutions to succeed by decimating forces sent out from Europe to prevent them.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Brilliant. Ranging freely across the 'Greater Caribbean' ... McNeill makes a riveting case that the primary driver in the colonial conflicts there was not political or economic but microbiological."

Charles C. Mann, Wall Street Journal "J. R. McNeill's new book does more than exhibit his usual gifts - breadth of range, mastery of material, depth of insight, freedom of thought, clarity of expression. It has changed the way I think about empires of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

and will challenge many readers' assumptions about the limits of human agency in shaping great events." Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, University of Notre Dame

"In this authoritative and engaging book, J. R. McNeill argues convincingly that disease played a pivotal role in many of the momentous events of Caribbean history. He shows how the region's disease ecology changed following the advent of European colonization and how this served and then subverted the interests of the Caribbean's oldest colonial powers. Mosquito Empires is indispensable to any student of Caribbean history or the history of disease." Mark Harrison, Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, University of Oxford

"Who would have guessed that the mosquito played such a vital role, shaping the fate of empires and revolutions, in such a vitally important part of the world? This provocative book is an eye-opener, written with great verve and wit." Philip Morgan, Johns Hopkins University

"For most of the last five centuries, the Atlantic empires - European and North American - wrested, fought wars, and killed thousands of citizens and slaves for possession of the wealth swaying in the fields of the Caribbean islands and coastlines. The dominant factors in the long conflict, no matter what the protagonists claimed, were not political or religious or even economic but septic, that is, the microbes of yellow fever and malaria. J. R. McNeill's book is by far the clearest, best informed, and scientifically accurate of the accounts available on this sugary conflict." Alfred W. Crosby, Professor Emeritus of History, Geography, and American Studies, University of Texas at Austin

"Drawing on an enormous documentary source base, culled from many archives and texts in several languages, and ranging effortlessly across military history and medical science, J. R. McNeill's book is a major achievement. Henceforth, histories of empire, warfare, and international relations that neglects the environmental context of the events they recount will be seriously deficient." Gabriel Paquette, Times Literary Supplement

"... this is a truly impressive book that makes a major contribution to our understanding of the Greater Caribbean and beyond." Matthew Mulcahy, William and Mary Quarterly

"McNeill's seminal and path-breaking new study will surely play a leading role in providing a clear historical understanding of colonization and its aftermath in a vast area of the Western Hemisphere." American Historical Review

"This ambitious work is an enjoyable, convincing read. Highly recommended." Choice

"... a valuable addition to the historiography of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Caribbean." Mariola Espinosa, Journal of Interdisciplinary History

"... a welcome addition to maritime and imperial history." Paul Webb, International Journal of Maritime History

"... a fine study that will be read and admired for generations to come." Paul Kopperman, The Journal of Southern History

"In his compelling new book, J. R. McNeill asserts that over the course of two centuries historical events in the Americas shifted on tides of fevered sweat and black vomit." Jennifer L. Anderson, European History Quarterly

"... gives

a valuable framework for understanding the biology of colonization and independence in the Americas." Lynn A. Nelson, Florida Historical Quarterly"... a wonderful book, as fun to read as it is thought-provoking and informative." Molly A. Warsh, Journal of World History

This book explores the links among ecology, disease, and international politics in the context of the Greater Caribbean in the seventeenth through early twentieth centuries. Yellow fever and malaria attacked newcomers, which helped keep the Spanish Empire Spanish in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In the late eighteenth and through the nineteenth century, these diseases helped revolutions to succeed by decimating European troops.

The author does not pretend that Washington's strategy and the timely intervention of the French fleet were not instrumental in causing Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown, but he makes a pretty persuasive case that both generals' strategies were made in the context of their awareness of the prevalence of malaria (not that either of the two knew malaria by that name or had any idea of the mechanism of disease transmission). This is just an interesting (to "Americans", at least) coda to a very good book focused on the impact of yellow fever and malaria on fortunes of Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch and American competitors in what the author calls the "Greater Caribbean Area".

Excellent book. Incredible how disease changed history.

very entertaining and enlightening, especially in light of the recent outbreaks

Very good!

I read this book because it was one of the references in "1493". This is one of those eye-opening books that every reader interested in Caribbean and Americas' history should read

A brilliant, fascinating, highly readable work of scholarship. It completely changed how I see the Atlantic World in those centuries. Much recommended.

I know the author slightly, so readers may want to take this recommendation with the proverbial grain of salt. But I thought this book was terrific -- full of interesting ideas and things I didn't know

about, all written in wonderfully clear prose. This story, the product of 20 years of research, tells how malaria and yellow fever came to the Americas, and the mind-boggling stuff that happened afterward. McNeill is an exceptionally careful, understated writer, always making sure the reader knows what is documented and what is speculation, and constantly stressing that the two diseases are not the \*only\* cause of the events he is describing. Nevertheless, it is clear that they played a big role in matters as weighty as the creation of American slavery and the Revolutionary War and as weird as the attempt by Scotland to seize Panama and the fact that Barbados was (briefly) one of the richest places in the world. Some of the events that McNeill recounts are astounding, and as he writes the reader can detect the barest hint of his raised eyebrows. Knowing McNeill a bit was how I first heard of this book, but not why I enjoyed reading it so much.

What a tome. I expected this to be a dry, scholarly work. It was. But it was well-written, and told the other side of much of the colonial history I knew from school and other reading. I had no idea that Scotland invaded Panama, that Jews fought with both pirates and their Spanish and Portuguese enemies, or how the Golden Age of Piracy in the Caribbean only happened because yellow fever went into remission for a few decades. This book is a welcome addition to my library.

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