

Devastating tragedies compared: europe's bubonic plague and latin america's smallpox...

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Bubonic Plague

An examination of the documents shows that the Bubonic Plague and smallpox both economically, socially, and politically affected the regions they were present in. The Bubonic Plague in Europe killed nearly one third of the population. As a result, crops rotted, there was a shortage of workers, and item prices skyrocketed. It was extremely difficult to trade and manufacture items so the market became inflated. Without enough workers, peasants received higher wages. Family members were deserted in fear that they were going to infect others. Smallpox in the New World had similar results to those of the Black Plague. Smallpox wiped out more than half of the Native American population. Without treatments for the diseases, the Bubonic Plague and smallpox devastated the areas they touched.

The Bubonic Plague in western Europe and smallpox in Latin America both affected the societies they spread to economically. In western Europe, because of the incredibly small population, there were not many people available to produce and trade goods. Prices shot up. According to Henry Knighton, a 14th-century author, " In the winter, there was such a want for hands, for every kind of work..." He explains how items which " in previous times was worth 1d. now cost 4d. or 5d." Henry Knighton's point of view about the economic effects of the Black Plague is shown in his entry for the Knighton's Chronicle. He shows how the workmen took advantage of the large death toll and demanded to be paid what they asked. Because of the shortage of workers, everyone had no choice but to pay the expensive fee. Smallpox has ties with economics because it was spread through trade

routes. Voyagers from Europe came to the New World to trade with the Native Americans, but they also brought along smallpox with them. This spread smallpox to Latin America, and was spread even more after the Native Americans came in contact with each other.

The Black Death socially damaged western Europe. People abandoned close friends and relatives, fled cities, and brought social contact to a minimum. Giovanni Boccaccio, author of *The Decameron*, writes that “ Most of [the lower and middle classes] remained in their houses, either through poverty or in hopes of safety, and fell sick by thousands... Many ended their lives in the streets both at night and during the day; and many others who died in their houses were only known to be dead because the neighbors smelled their decaying bodies.” This shows that neighbors were extremely scared to have any social contact in fear that they would become infected. The Black Death also affected western Europe socially because people needed a blame for the disease. Jewish people were used as scapegoats, and Jews throughout the world were accused of having caused it “ through the poison which they are said to have put in the water and the wells...” Smallpox, on the other hand, socially affected Latin America. After Hernando Cortes landed in Latin America, smallpox spread quickly because it was a new disease to the Native Americans. More than half of the population died, and many others died from starvation because they couldn't care for each other. Elizabeth A. Foster, a writer for the Greenwood Press, wrote that “ For as the Indians did not know the remedy for the disease and were very much in the habit of bathing frequently, whether well or ill, and continued to do so even when suffering from smallpox, they died in heaps, like bedbugs.” This quote shows that the

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Indians had no idea how smallpox spread and how to control it. They thought that their bodies would find a way to combat the virus, so they carried on with their normal routines. Because of this, the virus spread like wildfire and quickly infected over half of the Native American population.

The Bubonic Plague had also politically affected Europe. It crippled the power of the Church, because people were dying from the Bubonic Plague even when they were faithful to their religion. The credibility of the Church was hurt because of this. The people who were sick asked the Church to save them from the plague and the Church could not help. People began to realize that the Church was not "all powerful." The power of the Church was dented because of the Black Death. After "The Encounter" in Latin America, smallpox was transferred to the Native Americans. After many exploration voyages sent by Europe, smallpox spread across the Atlantic Ocean and into the New World. In the map, Cortes explores Tiaxcalan and the Aztecs from 1519 to 1521. According to the map, Smallpox breaks out in 1520 in Aztec and Tiaxcalan. Smallpox aided the fall of many Native American empires.

One extra document that would help the analysis would be a journal entry written by a Native American who lived when smallpox was beginning to infect thousands of people. This extra document would be helpful because it would provide a firsthand account of exactly what had happened at that time. I think this opinion is very valuable because it would provide valuable information on how the Native Americans would cope with the fear and how they tried to resist spreading of the virus.