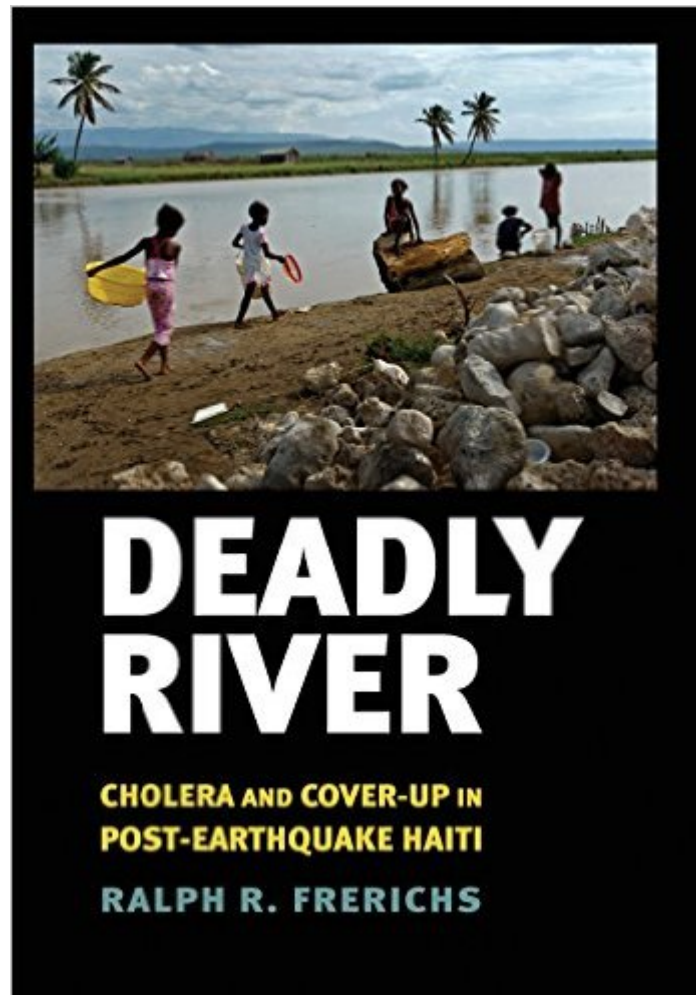


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Deadly River: Cholera And Cover-Up In Post-Earthquake Haiti (The Culture And Politics Of Health Care Work)



Synopsis

In October 2010, nine months after the massive earthquake that devastated Haiti, a second disaster began to unfold—soon to become the world's largest cholera epidemic in modern times. In a country that had never before reported cholera, the epidemic mysteriously and simultaneously appeared in river communities of central Haiti, eventually triggering nearly 800,000 cases and 9,000 deaths. What had caused the first cases of cholera in Haiti in recorded history? Who or what was the deadly agent of origin? Why did it explode in the agricultural-rich delta of the Artibonite River? When answers were few, rumors spread, causing social and political consequences of their own. Wanting insight, the Haitian government and French embassy requested epidemiological assistance from France. A few weeks into the epidemic, physician and infectious disease specialist Renaud Piarroux arrived in Haiti. In *Deadly River*, Ralph R. Frerichs tells the story of the epidemic—of a French disease detective determined to trace its origins so that he could help contain the spread and possibly eliminate the disease—and the political intrigue that has made that effort so difficult. The story involves political maneuvering by powerful organizations such as the United Nations and its peacekeeping troops in Haiti, as well as by the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Frerichs explores a quest for scientific truth and dissects a scientific disagreement involving world-renowned cholera experts who find themselves embroiled in intellectual and political turmoil in a poverty-stricken country. Frerichs's narrative highlights how the world's wealthy nations, nongovernmental agencies, and international institutions respond when their interests clash with the needs of the world's most vulnerable people. The story poses big social questions and offers insights not only on how to eliminate cholera in Haiti but also how nations, NGOs, and international organizations such as the UN and CDC deal with catastrophic infectious disease epidemics.

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Customer Reviews

In 2004, the United States, which had previously occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, kidnapped the president of Haiti, overthrew his government, and sent in United Nations "peace keepers." In 2010, an outbreak of cholera hit Haiti for the first time ever. The disease had previously been unknown in the country. The UN had sent in soldiers from Nepal where cholera had just broken out. It hadn't tested the soldiers for the disease. At the soldiers' camp in Haiti, a truck picked up their fecal waste on October 17, 2010, and drove it to a hilltop septic pit overlooking a river. The pit was already full and overflowing. The driver's boss told him to dump his load anywhere. So he dumped it into the river. Downriver, people started dying of cholera. An outbreak would spread rapidly. Thousands (and still rising) would perish. The "international community," with its benevolent military takeovers, had literally shat on the health of the Haitian people. Next it proceeded to make matters worse. The United Nations, international diplomats, hired scientists, the New York Times, National Public Radio, the Lancet, and the respectable humanitarian NGO complex in general spent years covering up and lying about what had happened. Because the armed occupying army of "peace keepers" was widely resented as an armed occupying army, many were concerned, or professed to be concerned, that honestly stating what had begun the cholera outbreak would lead to an outbreak of violence. In fact, the refusal to state what had happened led to the lynching of dozens of practitioners of voodoo who were scapegoated.

Nine months after the catastrophic January 2010 earthquake that took over 220,000 lives, UN 'peacekeeping' troops from Nepal brought cholera to Haiti and unleashed an epidemic that continues to this day. It is estimated that 7% of Haitians now carry the bacteria; over 8000 have died. Yet, the UN denies culpability (although Ban Ki Moon has indicated that he understands the origin of the disease) and continues to fight "the most organized challenge to UN immunity yet" (New York Times). Deadly River explores the history of the investigation into cholera by telling the story of French epidemiologist Renaud Piarroux, who was invited by the Haitian government to study the emerging infection. Frerichs worked closely with Piarroux as well as relying heavily on

journalistic accounts and official documents in weaving this tale about the intersections of politics and science. From the moment that Piarroux's investigations began suggesting UN-troops as a cause, his efforts were obfuscated, thwarted, and misrepresented by politicians the world over, including some in Haiti, who were relying on UN-peacekeeping forces to maintain lawfulness during a contested election season. Frerichs's engaging story conducts itself like a thrilling mystery in which we follow Piarroux along the course of his investigations - to villages in Haiti, to France, to official hearings and boardrooms. I simply loved the ways in which Frerich brings out the exciting 'detecting' element of scientific research - he presents clues about the discovery of cholera's origin as they unfolded for Piarroux, offering a fascinating look into how a large-scale scientific exploration with political implications takes shape.

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