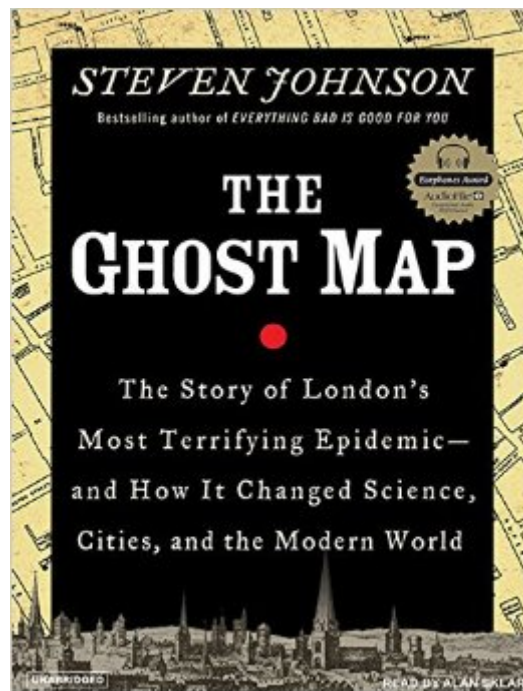


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# The Ghost Map: The Story Of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--And How It Changed Science, Cities, And The Modern World



## Synopsis

A thrilling historical account of the worst cholera outbreak in Victorian London-and a brilliant exploration of how Dr. John Snow's solution revolutionized the way we think about disease, cities, science, and the modern world. 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and commerce, teeming with people from all over the world, continually pushing the limits of infrastructure that's outdated as soon as it's updated.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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is surprisingly, one fascinating and important read that spins the historical reality of pathogenic disease with a well crafted story regarding the plight of a society facing a treacherous epidemic. Combining an in-depth view regarding the indefatigable energy and brilliance of Dr. John Snow in his quest to solve the deadliest outbreak of cholera in the history of London, with the history of epidemic plagues, 'The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic- And How it Changed Cities, Science, and The Modern World' provided me with one page-turning, gripping historical tale that also provided further insight into the plight free societies face today in lieu of the possibilities of biological or chemical attacks on innocent people. When I was recommended to read Steven Johnson's book, it was not for the sake of diving into a good read, but rather to 'browse' through it for further insight on the origins of water contamination and how, thru these origins, terrorist could look at contamination for horrific purposes. As a writer with an interest in international affairs, and a tendency to use fiction storytelling to share my views, I opened Steven Johnson's book and within pages was completely hooked on this extraordinarily written, well researched tell all of the London epidemic of cholera that killed so many lives. With reflection on how science viewed pathogenic outbreaks during the midpoint of the 19th Century, it was startling to find that there really existed a classification system that gave all sorts of bizarre reasons why a disease would spread, including a weight based upon wealth and financial disposition! We sure have come a long way . . . or have we?

The Ghost Map uses the Cholera outbreak in London in 1854 to weave together a compelling story of science, demographics and superstition. Rather than just engaging in a straightforward narrative about the outbreak, Johnson dives into a truly interesting analysis of the fear with which people viewed city living in the 1850s. Back then, nobody knew if a city of 2 million people, like London, would simply crumble under its own social weight. He also digs deeply into the science and medicine of the time (or lack thereof) and how it treated an outbreak like 1854's. In addition, he lays out the story of John Snow doing true scientific work, finding the real cause of the outbreak, winning some important converts, failing to win others, but ultimately saving many lives. What makes the

book so good is the way it places you into the mind of someone living in London in 1854 and making you understand why it was so hard for them to accept the true cause of the disease when it seems so obvious to us today. That experience makes a thoughtful reader wonder what things we take for granted today that will seem so obviously wrong in 150 years. The book stays at four stars, not five, for several reasons. First off, the actual namesake of the book, The Ghost Map, is little more than a tacked-on afterthought at the conclusion of the book. It's interesting, but more of a post-script than anything else, and certainly not appropriate as the title of the book - somebody must have thought it sounded like it would sell books. No worries though, the book it sells is a good one. Also, Johnson goes on some odd tangents at the end of the book talking about city life and trying to tie internet technology back to the work Snow did. It's a reach and not terribly relevant.

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