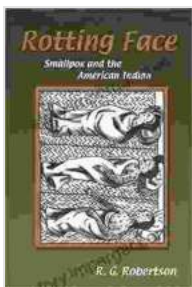


# Rotting Face Smallpox and the American Indian: A Tragic Story of Disease and Devastation

Smallpox, a deadly disease that ravaged populations throughout the world, played a pivotal role in the history of the American Indian people. The arrival of European colonizers in the Americas unleashed a catastrophic wave of smallpox epidemics that decimated Native American communities, leaving behind a legacy of suffering and loss. This article aims to explore the tragic story of smallpox and its devastating impact on the indigenous population of North America.

## The Arrival of Smallpox

Smallpox, caused by the variola virus, is an extremely contagious infectious disease characterized by fever, rash, and often severe scarring. It is believed that smallpox originated in Africa and spread to Europe and Asia through trade routes. In the late 15th century, European explorers brought smallpox to the Americas, where it encountered a population with no prior immunity to the disease.



## Rotting Face: Smallpox and the American Indian

by R. G. Robertson

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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## **Devastating Epidemics**

The of smallpox into the Americas set off a series of devastating epidemics that swept through Native American communities. The disease spread rapidly through contact with infected individuals and contaminated objects. The lack of immunity among the indigenous population made them particularly vulnerable to the virus.

The first major smallpox epidemic in the Americas occurred in Mexico in 1520, shortly after the arrival of Hernan Cortes and his conquistadors. The disease killed an estimated 80% of the Aztec population. In the following decades, smallpox epidemics spread throughout North America, reaching even remote tribes in the far west.

## **The Impact on Native American Populations**

The impact of smallpox on Native American populations was catastrophic. Entire villages and tribes were wiped out, and those who survived often bore the disfiguring scars of the disease. Smallpox not only decimated the population but also disrupted social and economic structures. The loss of so many able-bodied adults weakened communities and made them more vulnerable to further epidemics and warfare.

The psychological impact of smallpox was equally devastating. The disease was often seen as a punishment from the gods, and its disfiguring effects left many survivors feeling ashamed and isolated. The fear of smallpox haunted Native American communities for generations, shaping their daily lives and beliefs.

## **Government Policies and Native American Resistance**

The spread of smallpox among Native American populations was exacerbated by the policies of European governments. Colonial authorities often failed to take adequate measures to contain the disease, and in some cases, they even used smallpox as a weapon against Native American tribes.

Despite the devastating impact of smallpox, Native American communities fought back against the disease. They developed their own methods of treatment and prevention, and they often resisted government policies that sought to control their movement and isolate those who were infected.

## **The Role of Native American Healers**

Native American healers played a vital role in combating the smallpox epidemics. They used traditional herbal remedies, sweat lodges, and other spiritual practices to treat the sick and prevent the spread of the disease. Some healers also developed methods of inoculation, which involved exposing individuals to a mild form of smallpox to build immunity.

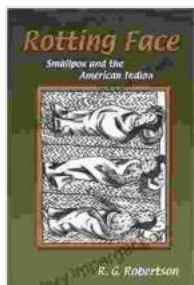
## **The Legacy of Smallpox**

The scars of smallpox can still be seen in Native American communities today. The disease left a lasting legacy of physical, psychological, and social trauma. It disrupted traditional lifeways, weakened political structures, and contributed to the cultural decline of many Native American nations.

However, the story of smallpox and the American Indian is not simply a tale of tragedy and loss. It is also a story of resilience and survival. Native

American communities endured the horrors of smallpox and emerged with a renewed determination to preserve their cultures and traditions.

Smallpox played a devastating role in the history of the American Indian people. The of the disease by European colonizers set off a series of catastrophic epidemics that decimated Native American populations and left a lasting legacy of suffering. However, despite the horrors they endured, Native American communities fought back against smallpox and survived. Their resilience and determination are a testament to the strength and spirit of the American Indian people.



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