

Things to think about:

J.R. McNeill, “Revolutionary Mosquitoes of the Atlantic World: Malaria and Independence in the United States of America.”

What does McNeill mean by “historical dark matter”? (145)

What does “mosquito determinism” mean? Is it different from environmental determinism?

Can a disease be partisan? Why or why not? (147)

Why was smallpox a less effective as a partisan disease than malaria was?

How conscious were people of the differential disease environments McNeill describes?

What are some of the natural and social circumstances that, according to McNeill, allowed mosquitoes to shape political events? (149)

How closely did differential susceptibility to disease overlap with political beliefs in the Atlantic world McNeill describes?

Why does McNeill argue that mosquito-borne diseases were decisive in colonial revolutions, but not in Surinam’s slave revolts? (152)

To what extent did generals on both sides of the conflict shape their campaigns according to differential disease environments?

Do you think “systematic” well describes the impact of mosquitoes on Cornwallis’s army? (166)

How does McNeill weigh up the impact of the mosquito in the revolutionary conflicts of this period? Was their impact more or less important than political factors? Social factors? Economic factors? Etc...

McNeill writes that helping to “advance the lofty goals of human freedom” may be “the only helpful thing mosquitoes have ever done for Homo sapiens.” (167) Can you think of other cases where mosquitoes have aided our species?

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