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Review of *Disease and Demography in the Americas* by John W. Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker

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Disease and Demography in the Americas. John W. Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker, ed. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. Maps, photos, and references. x + 294 pp. \$52.00.

Disease and Demography in the Americas addresses an important issue in history of European-Native American interaction: what was the disease impact of European contact? A collection of papers came from a 1989 Smithsonian sponsored conference "Disease and Demography in the Americas, Changing Patterns Before and After 1492," this edited volume addresses disease and demography on a regional basis. The first section, "Disease before and after contact" confronts the evidence of prehistoric and historic disease in North America, while the second section, "Population size before and after contact" deals with Native American population reduction at the time of contact and a subsequent increase when Native American populations developed resistance, either cultural or biological, to European diseases.

The thirteen papers in the first section put to rest any notion that disease was rare among prehistoric Native Americans. There is abundant evidence from many regions in North America and South America that disease was a common aspect of life for many prehistoric populations due to intensifying agricultural strategies coupled with population growth in various ecological regimes, some of which promoted disease. However, disease was variable in type and prevalence between regions. Consequently, the impact of European contact on Native Americans was variable. For example, the Spanish *Entrada* in Florida resulted in the rapid decline of health. In contrast, Plains peoples in South Dakota thrived in the period immediately after contact. Thus, the nature of disease before contact and the impact of disease after contact varied between region and population.

The twelve papers in the second section approach the issue from the standpoint of demographic changes associated with contact. Prior to the publication of this volume, the estimates of Native American population size varied dramatically, especially for the precontact period. This highlighted the need for careful, empirical evaluation of Native American demography. The authors of this volume address this need admirably by refining population estimates for the precontact period. The analysis of demographic data for the contact period shows that populations did not respond uniformly. Certainly population crashes occurred, but not concurrently and uniformly for all regions. Crosby's summary chapter to this section emphasizes the fact that although considerable progress has been made in the field of paleodemographics, there is substantial room for improvement.

The volume succeeds in documenting the impact of disease on Native American peoples. In general, the extent of the impact is overwhelming and represents a disaster only comparable in European history with the Black Death epidemic between 1347 and 1350. Yet, the extreme impact of disease among Native Americans has been poorly documented, primarily because few people were present to record the spread of disease. This volume presents a comprehensive documentation of contact disease ferreted from skeletal remains and historical texts and therefore stands as a major contribution to the study of human history and disease. **Karl J. Reinhard**, *Department of Anthropology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.