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Review of *Stories in the Time of Cholera: Racial Profiling During a Medical Nightmare* by Charles L. Briggs with Clara Mantini-Briggs; University of California Press, 2003

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Science and Technology

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Briggs, Charles L. with Clara Mantini-Briggs. ***Stories in the Time of Cholera: Racial Profiling During a Medical Nightmare***. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003. 456 pp. ISBN 0-520-23031-0, \$34.95.

Briggs chronicles the cholera epidemic in the Amacuro Delta of Venezuela in 1992 and 1993 and examines the modes of discourse that shaped perceptions of the tragedy. He demonstrates how the dominant narrative—that is, that of public health officials, journalists, and doctors—was based not on data and reason, but primarily on deeply ingrained cultural and racial stereotypes. He contends that the racialized discourse adversely affected the response of the health care community to the epidemic, resulting in hundreds of preventable deaths.

Briggs reports that health care facilities were unavailable to the indigenous Warao, and due to an ineffectual outreach infrastructure, health care workers did not attempt to treat the ill where they lived. The afflicted were left to seek medical assistance, often at great distances from their home without adequate transportation, and one group was quarantined. Briggs then reports how and why official statistics related to the outbreak were distorted.

Briggs also discusses Warao medical practices. He notes that the healers were unfamiliar with cholera, which had not been reported in the Delta since the previous century, so they had no tools to respond to the outbreak. Though it could have used a tighter outline, it is readable and well footnoted. Mantini-Briggs's contributions to the book are particularly engaging. Her descriptions of her experience helping the cholera victims and her negative interactions with her health care colleagues are chilling and moving.

—Sue Ann Gardner
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