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In this book Mc Neill traces 294 years of the interrelations between humans and the environment in the Greater Caribbean to demonstrate how the „lowly mosquitoes and mindless viruses“ have shaped international affairs. Defining the Greater Caribbean as the Atlantic coastal regions of South Central and North America, Mc Neill discusses episodes involving the main European interlopers in the continental area between Suriname and the Chesapeake and the Caribbean islands during which the environmental impact on European activity was evident. Organized into 8 chapters, the book aims to show how „quests for wealth and power changed ecologies in the Greater Caribbean and how ecological changes in turn shaped the fortunes of empire, war and revolution in the years between 1620 and 1914“ (p. 2). By juxtaposing the ecological context, prevailing environmental trends and the social and political forces influencing European activity, this book illustrates how factors, which might easily be dismissed, could have significant outcomes. The discussion is centered on environmental changes, caused by European activity, which provided ideal conditions for the growth of the mosquito population and facilitated the spread of the diseases for which they were vectors. In the process of making a case for consideration of the impact of nature on political history, the author identifies the ways ecological constraints impact on history and political developments and he ably demonstrates the interweave between environmental factors and other facets of history.

McNeill argues that the struggles for imperial control of the territories of the region occurred during a period of rapid environmental change during which the unstable evolving ecologies provided the ideal incubators for mosquitoes, particularly the carriers of yellow fever and malaria. Seeking to give yellow fever and malaria their “due,” the book deemphasizes human agency and other considerations and focuses on the role of mosquitoes and pathogens in the course of human affairs during the period under study. This was done to demonstrate how ecology restricts human action as well as how human action stimulated environmental change which permitted mosquitoes and virus to make history in the region (p. 2). Thus he identifies a mutual and reciprocal relationship of geopolitics and ecology and underscores the significance of disease on warfare and settlement in the region. His discussion ranges through diseases in the garrisons and the forts of Cartagena, fevers in Darien, which assisted the creation of Great Britain (p. 119), malaria and differential immunity protecting Maroon freedom in Suriname, climate change and its influence on disease and epidemics, the vulnerability of newcomers to malaria and yellow fever, the challenge these diseases posed both to western trained doctors and Afro creole practitioners and the treatments used by the former which made them just as deadly as the diseases themselves and the nursing care of Afro Caribbean women to the privileged afflicted (p. 63).

McNeill’s argument about the linkage between ecological and political affairs and the influence of yellow fever and malaria in shaping settlement, building empire, imperial rivalries and revolution in the greater Caribbean between 1540 and 1910s, is convincing. Playing a minimal role before the 1640s yellow fever proved to be a great ally of Spain, defending its empire from rivals. In setting the scene to demonstrate how the disease impact operated, Mc Neill shows how mosquito-friendly sugar plantations and rice fields were in providing the environment for the spread of yellow fever and malaria respectively. Sugar cultivation and the urbanization and population growth it spawned, provided more meals of cane juice and blood, for mosquitoes (p. 49-50 ). While the local ecology of the sugar plantations boosted the food supply of *Aedes aegypti*, the addition of more enslaved Africans meant increased movement of slave ships and more opportunities for stow away mosquitoes to arrive and establish new colonies in the numerous scattered
ports. Ships were therefore "super vectors" circulating mosquitoes and viruses from port to port (p. 52). The "ecological tumult" associated with the plantation economy also helped improve breeding prospects for the Anopheles mosquito. Oxen and mules kept on plantations also improved Anopheles nutrition while irrigated rice provided the ideal habitat for these mosquitoes. Thus Mc Neill demonstrates a strong link between rice, mosquitoes and malaria (p. 57).

McNeill concludes that mosquitoes, the "unpaid and unacknowledged auxiliaries" of the Spanish proved far more deadly than military or regular army troops. Disease, he argues, functioned as a battalion in the revolutionary wars of the Atlantic America in the 1770s demonstrating how pathogens, and differential resistance to them radically improved the "otherwise doubtful military prospects of the ragged legions" of Washington and Greene, Toussaint and Dessalines, Bolivar, Gomez and Maceo, Cornwallis, Le Clerc, Morillo, and Weyler..." (p. 305). While evidence of the role of disease abounds, there is little to substantiate his evaluation of the military prospects of the revolutionary forces.

Since the European trained doctors could not stem the tide of yellow fever and malaria assaults on the armies, McNeill asserts that before the 1770s, these diseases underpinned the geopolitical status quo in the greater Caribbean and subsequently undermined it. He identifies malaria's impact on the outcome of the American Revolution and yellow fever's importance in the Louisiana purchase and the reemergence of imperial USA and discusses the role of the US army in Cuba in taming Yellow fever and facilitating the successful undertaking in the Panama Canal. Until the "sanitation revolution" yellow fever ruled.

The book is strong on its revelations about the unintended consequences of plantation agriculture. The occurrence of soil erosion, fuel shortage, rat infestations and the sugar stimulated terrestrial and marine ecological transformation of the region are all discussed (p. 31-32). Also explained is how the trading network spawned by plantations, through its main pillars the slave trade, the plantation and the port city, combined to improve the conditions for the vector of yellow fever (p. 51). Of particular significance is his explanation of the race factor in disease through the concepts of genetic, differential, herd and cross immunity, which provides a plausible alternative to the racist explanations of contemporary writers.

Although his argument regarding the extent of human versus mosquito/disease agency in the revolutionary wars could be debated, the book provides strong evidence of the impact of the environment on history and of the human impact on the environment and its consequences. Of particular interest are his concepts of "creole ecology" to describe the situation created by the range of floral, faunal and human introductions into the region and of the "ecological tumult" created by human activity in the Caribbean. This book is valuable for the refreshing perspective that it offers and the contribution it makes to Caribbean historiography in general and to the environmental history of the Caribbean in particular. It certainly assists an understanding of the intricacies of the history of the region, it raises a number of themes that could stimulate further research, It is an excellent base and a "must read" for students and researchers of Caribbean history.