

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

The Tainted Gift: The Disease Method of Frontier Expansion. By Barbara Alice Mann.

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3cp7z8rf>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 35(3)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

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**Publication Date**

2011-06-01

**DOI**

10.17953

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**The Tainted Gift: The Disease Method of Frontier Expansion.** By Barbara Alice Mann. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009. 172 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

For several decades, there has been speculation and debate over whether disease was deliberately spread to Native Americans as an effective method of solving the “Indian Problem” in the United States. Following the events of September 11, discussions regarding the use of smallpox as a biological weapon against Indians as early as 1763 took on new meaning and relevance, thus reinvigorating the debate. In general, the idea that European settlers, as well as the US government, would actively participate in such nefarious actions is met with outrage, skepticism, or vehement denial. Did Euro-Americans purposefully infect Native Americans with horrendous diseases as a way to steal their land? Would it even have been possible to infect tribes with smallpox by using blankets? Or was the spread of epidemic disease among Indians simply a serendipitous occurrence for settlers seeking to expand westward? Surely the American government would not be a party to such terrorist tactics!

As others have done before, Barbara Alice Mann seeks to address the speculation and denial over this volatile issue in *The Tainted Gift*. The critical difference, however, is that instead of simply reinterpreting the same information utilized by other scholars, Mann takes us on a journey of exploration and discovery: a journey through myriad forgotten primary documents found in obscure archives, documents difficult to read and sometimes in other languages, and records neglected by other scholars because they just took too much effort to find. The result of this exhaustive research, conducted by a scholar self-described as profoundly motivated and a little obsessive, is the discovery of what really happened in the four representative cases included in *The Tainted Gift*. Not just a rehashing of the same old “safe” ground covered by an endless stream of scholars, but fresh, new information that many times goes against what previously has been accepted as fact.

*The Tainted Gift* includes a foreword by Bruce Johansen, an introduction by the author, and four chapters, each of which deals with a separate purported case of Euro-Americans intentionally inflicting disease on Indian populations. The cases include the asserted giving of smallpox-infected blankets to the Lenape at Fort Pitt in 1763; the 1832 Choctaw Removal into areas teeming with cholera and smallpox epidemics; a smallpox epidemic on the High Plains in 1837; and allegations of Dr. Marcus Whitman poisoning the Cayuses in Oregon in 1847. The exhaustive research conducted by Mann is evidenced in a thirty-seven-page notes section containing 823 entries and a twenty-nine-page bibliography with 384 citations. The book has no conclusion and simply ends with the last chapter. The lack of a conclusion feels awkward in that there is

no real closure. Mann offers no explanation for this omission, but by the end of her very intense examination of the terrible things that had been done to Native peoples, one senses that perhaps Mann just couldn't write any more, that she was simply drained by all the horrors she had uncovered.

Each of the four cases included in *The Tainted Gift* has been the subject of at least minimal scholarship by various historians over time. In the four chapters, Mann's methodology generally follows the same format with the "official" story presented first, followed by an evaluation of secondary sources and relevant historiography. She then presents an overview of the historic and ethnographic context in which the deliberate dispensing of disease occurred and, finally, the results of her exhaustive research. Mann proceeds in much the same way as a prosecutor in a criminal case, methodically laying out evidence culled from primary, secondary, and oral sources to prove her thesis that Euro-Americans, whether individuals or governments, intentionally infected Native Americans with disease as an effective and gruesome way to solve the "Indian Problem" and facilitate frontier expansion. Interestingly, in every case, the "official story" traditionally espoused by mainstream historians differs greatly from the true story, as discovered during Mann's rigorous scrutiny of all available sources.

A telling example of this dichotomy is found in the first chapter, "Out of Our Special Regard for Them: The 1763 Gift of Smallpox." Arguably the most famous of the disease-as-weapon cases known to scholars and the general public alike, particularly after September 11, is the alleged gifting of smallpox-infected blankets to Indians at Fort Pitt by Lord Jeffrey Amherst in 1763. This incident is based on July 7 and 16, 1763, memos from Amherst to his field commander, Colonel Henry Bouquet, which suggested inoculating disaffected tribes of Indians with blankets. Settler histories going back more than half a century have made the assumption that Amherst was thus responsible for this first act of biological warfare and that the smallpox-infected articles were dried. As noted by Mann, these assumptions serve to undermine the facts by excusing Amherst and arguing that no real damage could have been done because dried *Variola* would no longer have been viable. Mann's research convincingly proves both assumptions to be false. According to her sources, the first documented incident of Euro-Americans using smallpox as a biological weapon against Indians occurred at approximately 4:00 PM on June 24, 1763, when Simeon Ecuyer, William Trent, and Alexander McKee gave two blankets and one handkerchief taken directly from the Fort Pitt smallpox hospital to five Lenapes as a "gift of peace." As evidenced by available primary sources, Amherst's only actual involvement was to comment on the action taken by Ecuyer and colleagues. The blankets and handkerchief, taken directly from a smallpox patient, were certainly not dried, but carried active *Variola*, which did cause a great deal of harm.

Mann writes in a refreshingly honest manner, beginning with her stated disdain for the bland summaries that typically serve as introductions for standard history books. She does not dance around the issue of whether Euro-Americans intentionally inflicted egregious diseases on Native Americans or whether enough documentation exists to support the issue either way. Instead, in her typically straightforward manner, Mann tells us from the beginning that these awful things did happen, that the proof is in existing primary-source documents and oral narratives, but that most scholars have just been too lazy to look hard enough for the evidence. Although her original intent was simply to look under all the archival rocks in order to see what she could find, with no preconceived ideas to learn once and for all if the stories about the intentional use of disease were truth or fabrication, in the end it became something different. Once Mann discovered incontrovertible proof that Euro-American invaders and the US government used disease as a biological weapon against Native Americans as early as 1763, her intent changed to what she refers to as “owning up,” of accepting the fact that these things happened and telling the truth about them.

As a Seneca elder and activist, it would be easy and perhaps expected for Mann to rail against whites in general, put blame for the sins of the fathers on their descendants, and make whites feel guilty for these things that were done. She does not. Instead, Mann stresses that white guilt is part of the problem. The defensiveness that rides along with guilt has not only kept historians from being whole in their examinations of the disease-as-weapon issue, but also has made people turn away from the truth because it is just too horrible to acknowledge. With that turning away, it becomes easier and easier to pretend that the bad things never happened and, ultimately, easier for them to happen again. Mann’s methodology in writing *The Tainted Gift* is prosecutorial in that all the evidence she discovered on her journey for truth is laid out in a logical and thorough manner for all to see, with only one possible conclusion to each case. As hard as that conclusion may be to accept, Mann tells us that we must accept it not only because it is the truth but also because it is not our fault, and that we are not responsible for these awful things. As Mann so wisely tells her students, “There is no reason for you to assume that you must defend misdeeds, simply because Europeans once committed them. You are not responsible for what happened. All that you are responsible for is what you do, once you walk out the door, knowing that these things did happen” (xvii). That is the same lesson that readers of *The Tainted Gift* must take away with them.

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