

### **Weekly Writing Assignment #3: Reading Carefully**

-- Due in Section, week of 9/27 - 9/29 --

The first writing assignment asked you to imagine what Crosby would say about Jones, with respect to virgin soil epidemics. Answering that question well required understanding the most important arguments made by each. Many of the responses to the assignment instead picked one or two things said by each -- often not the most important points -- and used those to predict how Crosby would respond. This might be a correct answer, but it is not an ideal answer. This assignment revisits the task of distilling the central arguments of secondary sources, something that will be crucial as the semester goes along, and something that will improve your ability to make clear and important arguments in your own writing.

The year is 1834 and the mayor of New York City is running for re-election. His opponents are blaming him for the disastrous cholera epidemic of 1832, saying that he failed to show leadership during a crisis. He hires you as a consultant, because of your expertise as a historian of medicine and public health, to help him answer these attacks. He wants you to provide him with some brief talking points about the epidemic and the government's response. Did anyone know that the epidemic would strike? Could anything have been done to prevent the appearance of cholera in New York? Once the disease broke out in the city, were there steps that city officials could have taken to contain the epidemic? Consider both what could have been done in an ideal world, and what would have been realistic in New York City in 1832. Feel free either to answer this question as you think Rosenberg would answer, or to provide different answers based on what you have learned from Rosenberg and filtered with your own creativity.

Any similarity to the current debate about Katrina responses is not a coincidence, but please stay focused on cholera in New York City.

As with all of these assignments, keep your advice short (target: 200 words). There are no right or wrong answers; we are interested in your ability to understand the sources and think creatively about them. If you mention specific material from the text, or use quotations, please provide page numbers.