

Response Essay on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ebola in West Africa and  
*Walking Corpses: Leprosy in Byzantium and the Medieval West*

**Paper Prompt**

*Ebola in West Africa*

On March 22, 2014, the news agency *Reuters* reported, “Guinea has received confirmation that a mysterious disease that has killed up to 59 people in the West African country, and may have spread to neighboring Sierra Leone, is the hemorrhagic fever Ebola.”<sup>1</sup> As the disease, a virulent pathogen with mortality rates of up to 90 percent, spread across West Africa, fear and concern grew that it could morph into a worldwide pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Within three days, *Doctors Without Borders* and the *World Health Organization* were already reporting about Ebola’s origins, method of transmission, and treatment efforts.<sup>3</sup> As the pathogen jumped across the African region (the countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia), those who had contracted the disease found themselves carriers of more than a deadly illness – they were now, as one doctor indicated, “Thanks be to God, I am cured. But now I have a new disease: the stigmatization that I am a victim of... This disease (the stigma) is worse than the fever.”<sup>4</sup> Medical professionals thanked the divine for their cure to their physical ailments and some West African preachers offered the advice, “I believe the virus could be contained through God’s miracle.”<sup>5</sup> In many respects, the Ebola outbreak of 2014 tested not only our modern global health knowledge and response, but our faith in the divine.

*Leprosy in the Medieval World*

In *Walking Corpses*, Timothy S. Miller and John W. Nesbitt discuss the origins of leprosy, ideas and attitudes about its transmission and causes, and its treatment in Byzantium and the Latin West. The range of responses to the epidemic, sometimes referred to as the “Holy Disease”, included confinement of the ill to leprosariums and the use of baths for treatment.<sup>6</sup> Others cast blame on “the Demon” and “Devil” for creating vicious societal attitudes toward lepers and observed that the “disease dissolves the bond of family relationship and overturns the law of friendship.”<sup>7</sup> Just as was the case in 2014, leprosy in the Middle Ages tested the bounds of medical knowledge, human compassion, and faith.

*Your Prompt*

After taking into consideration the 2014 outbreak and response to Ebola in West Africa, it is readily apparent that medieval Byzantines and Europeans understood, treated, and responded to leprosy in a very modern manner. In fact, it could be argued that given the lack of scientific knowledge and treatment options, our medieval counterparts were more enlightened in their responses and attitudes than we were in 2014.

*Please state why or why not you agree with this prompt using a thesis statement and evidence to bolster to your claims.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Reuters, “Guinea Confirms Fever Is Ebola, Has Killed Up to 59,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2014, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2014/03/22/world/africa/22reuters-guinea-ebola.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Associated Press, “Ebola Victims Quarantined in Guinea,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2014, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/03/25/world/africa/ap-af-guinea-ebola.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Donald G. McNeil Jr., “Ebola, Killing Scores in Guinea, Threatens Nearby Nations,” *New York Times*, March 24, 2014, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/25/health/ebola-killing-scores-in-guinea-threatens-nearby-nations.html>; The Associated Press, “Survivors of Ebola Face Second ‘Disease’: Stigma,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2014, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/04/27/world/africa/ap-af-west-africa-surviving-ebola.html>.

<sup>5</sup> The Associated Press, “Prayers, Precautions in W Africa Amid Ebola Threat,” *New York Times*, June 10, 2014, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/06/10/world/africa/ap-af-west-africa-ebola.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Timothy S. Miller and John W. Nesbitt, *Walking Corpses: Leprosy in Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013): 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 188-189.

## Deadline and Submission Process

- A partial draft of this essay (the first 1.5 to 2 pages) should be completed by Thursday, February 12<sup>th</sup>. Please bring your essay to class because we review them in small groups.
- You will meet with either Dr. Martinez or Mr. Clark for a 10-15 minute appointment during the week of February 16-20 to discuss your draft paper and specific ways to improve it. This appointment is not optional. Failure to meet for your appointment will result in a full letter-grade deduction on your paper. (For example, your grade will be lowered from a “B-“ to a “C-“.
- The final essay should be submitted on Thursday, February 26<sup>th</sup> at the beginning of class. Late assignments will not be accepted unless prior consent was granted.

## Sources for Your Paper

For this assignment, please use the text, *Walking Corpses: Leprosy in Byzantium and the Latin West* by Timothy S. Miller and John W. Nesbitt and the provided *New York Times* articles.

## Preparing and Formatting of Your Essay

- Your essay should be three to four pages long.
- You should argue a position in your essay, i.e., use a thesis statement.
- Use 11 or 12 point font, 1 inch margins, double-spacing, and page numbering.
- Use a topic sentence to start each paragraph so that the reader knows what you intend on arguing within it.
- Use a proper introduction, body (several paragraphs), and a brief conclusion in your paper. Indent the start of each paragraph.
- **You should use and quote at least three specific examples from *Walking Corpses* and at least two examples from the news articles to support your thoughts.** Use *The Chicago Manual of Style* to footnote your sources. See Dr. Martinez’s Writing Resources for Students at <http://bit.ly/16tj9SV>.
- Please include a Works Cited or Bibliography.
- Please staple your paper together and attach a copy of the grading rubric to the back of your paper.

HIST 1020: The Medieval World  
Grading Rubric for a Response Essay on

*Ebola and Walking Corpses*

Minimum Requirements (All aspects must be fulfilled to receive a grade of “B minus” or better):

Requirements	Yes	No
1. Is this rubric stapled/attached to their paper?		
2. Does the paper utilize a proper introduction, body, and conclusion?		
3. Does this paper present a thesis statement that argues their position?		
4. Does the paper reference at least three examples from <i>Walking Corpses</i> and two from the articles?		
5. Does the paper use footnotes properly?		
6. Is the paper at least three pages in length?		
7. Is there a works cited or bibliography included?		

Stylistic Considerations (To earn an “A” or “B,” all considerations must be rated “Very Good” or better):

Issues	Needs Work	Displays Basic Competence	Better Than Average	Very Good	Excellent
1. No grammatical errors, writing mistakes, awkward phrases, run-on sentences, or fragments.					
2. No spelling mistakes or uses of a word incorrectly.					
3. No slang or overly “conversational” text.					
4. Definitely uses topic sentences to start each paragraph.					
5. Definitely uses examples and cites where those examples appear in the text correctly. Definitely quotes some text and paraphrases other portions of the text.					
6. Definitely completes all aspects of the assignment.					

Argument/Content Considerations (To earn an “A” or “B,” all considerations must be rated “Very Good” or better):

Does this paper...?	Needs Work	Displays Basic Competence	Better Than Average	Very Good	Excellent
1. Make compelling points in reference to the prompt?					
2. Use evidence effectively to prove their position?					

**Three Overall Comments on Your Paper:**

**Letter Grade:**