



The Pox and the Covenant: Mather, Franklin, and the Epidemic That Changed America's Destiny

Tony Williams

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For one hundred years, God had held to his promise, and the colonists had as well. When the first Puritans sailed into Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, weak from the ocean journey, they formed a covenant with each other and with God to establish a city on a hill-a commitment to live uncorrupted lives together or all suffer divine wrath for their collective sin. But now, a century later, the arrival of one doomed ship would put this covenant to its greatest test.

On April 22, 1721, the HMS *Seahorse* arrived in Boston from the West Indies, carrying goods, cargo, and, unbeknownst to its crew, a deadly virus. Soon, a smallpox epidemic had broken out in Boston, causing hundreds of deaths and panic across the city. The clergy, including the famed Cotton Mather, turned to their standard form of defense against disease: fasting and prayer. But a new theory was also being offered to the public by the scientific world: inoculation. The fierce debate over the right way to combat the tragedy would become a battle between faith and reason, one that would set the city aflame with rage and riot.

The Pox and the Covenant is a story of well known figures such as Cotton Mather, James Franklin, and a young Benjamin Franklin struggling to fight for their cause among death and debate-although not always for the side one would expect. In the end, the incredible results of the epidemic and battle would reshape the colonists' view of their destiny, setting for America a new course, a new covenant, and the first drumbeats of revolution.

Praise for Pox and the Covenant:

"A welcome shade of gray into the traditional depiction of Puritans as repressive and closed-minded" - Boston Globe

"A fascinating aside to American medical history." - Publisher's Weekly

"With present-day controversy over vaccination, everything old is new again. And Williams' history is timely as well as engaging." - Booklist



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