

## The ugly history of blaming ethnic groups for outbreaks

As the coronavirus outbreak grows in scale and scope, a nasty side effect spreads: discrimination. We're seeing numerous reports of verbal and physical abuse aimed at ethnic Chinese.

Sadly, this is nothing new: Past outbreaks have often gone hand in hand with ugly prejudice, with various ethnic or racial groups blamed for the disease.

Consider the gold standard of **pandemics**: the bubonic plague, better known as the Black Death. It came roaring into Europe in 1348 and managed to kill off a quarter of the population within a few short years. As the death toll soared, many self-professed Christians looked for an explanation — and a way to put an end to the epidemic.

pandemic 世界性传染病

anti-Semitism 反犹太主义

They fell back on anti-**Semitism**. Because some Jewish communities initially escaped the epidemic, Christians accused them of masterminding the outbreak. Lacking a **germ** theory of disease, they claimed that Jews had poisoned the wells, or as one **deranged** medieval conspiracy theorist claimed, the Jews "wished to extinguish all of **Christendom**, through their poisons of frogs and spiders mixed into oil and cheese."

germ 微生物

deranged 疯狂的; 精神错乱的

Christendom 基督教世界

zealot 狂热者

These **zealots** proceeded with a **bloodletting** as horrifying as the plague itself. In town squares, mobs gathered together Jewish communities and burned them alive **en masse**. And yet the plague continued to rage, killing off these same communities.

bloodletting 杀戮; 裁员

en masse 全体地

The practical problem with identifying a particular group as the exclusive carriers of disease (or the **culprits** behind the spread of it) is that it blinds people to the reality viruses and bacteria don't care if you're from Wuhan or Washington. If you've got a pulse, you'll make an excellent host.

culprit 犯人; 罪犯