

The Plague Comes to America: Racism, Science and Politics in US History



Speaker: Christof Mauch (Director, Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, LMU)

Moderator: Shen Hou (the Center for Ecological History, RUC)

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Christof Mauch is Director of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, and Chair in American Cultural History at LMU Munich. He is an Honorary Professor at Renmin University, a past President of the European Society for Environmental History and a former Director of the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C. (1999-2007). [His recent and upcoming books include *Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear* (2019); *Urwald der Bayern (Bavaria's Primeval Forest)* (2020), and *Grüne Neue Welt: Reisen in die Geschichte und Natur der USA (Green New World: Travels into U.S. Nature and History)* (2021)].

The Plague that came to California in 1900 was the first plague epidemic in the continental United States. The epidemic was recognized by medical doctors, but its existence was denied for a long time by leading politicians. The news about the epidemic was fought with fake news - and the truth about it was fought more aggressively than the epidemic itself. The story of the plague is a medical and political detective story - a story about the suppression of science, about racism (in San Francisco's Chinatown) and about unlikely heroes - such as bacteriologists and public health officials.



San Francisco's plague outbreak was concentrated in the Chinatown district, just a few blocks from what is now the Port of San Francisco.



Mass autopsies of rats were crucial to ending San Francisco's bubonic-plague epidemic.