

**FORUM: HISTORICAL CRISIS COMMITTEE (HCC)**

**ISSUE: Addressing the Spread and Consequences of the Black Death**

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Currently a junior at SSIS and wanting to share my profound passion for public speaking, I am honored to be the Head Chair of HCC. Outside of his 3 years of MUN, I enjoy badminton, debating, reading, doom scrolling, and for some reason like sharks and most things aquatic. I look forward to all the fruitful debates and wish you all the best.



My name is Minh Truong, and I'm a freshman at SSIS. I am thrilled to serve as the HCC Deputy Chair! I have been doing MUN for 2 years, mostly delegating in crisis committees. Beyond MUN, I like to participate in DECA, play football, and listen to music. I'm excited to connect with you all and enjoy our engaging debates.



My name is Chester, and I am a freshman. I've been doing MUN for 2 years and attended about 6 conferences. Beyond that, I also do DECA, robotics, and golf. I am very happy to be chatting about my interest, but more than that, I am excited to listen to fruitful debates about the Black Death. Good luck delegates.

## Introduction

The Historical Crisis Committee (HCC) is a specialized committee that deals with issues in the past instead of the present and future agenda. Instead of representing modern nations, in this committee in particular, delegates will be representing medieval nations to past issues, issues that profoundly shaped our world even to now. The SSISMUN HCC issue is "Addressing the Spread and Consequences of the Black Death," where delegates will debate the spread and consequences of the deadliest disease in medieval Europe. As the house follows crisis updates, would the house successfully combat the woes brought by the disease?

## Definition of Key Terms:

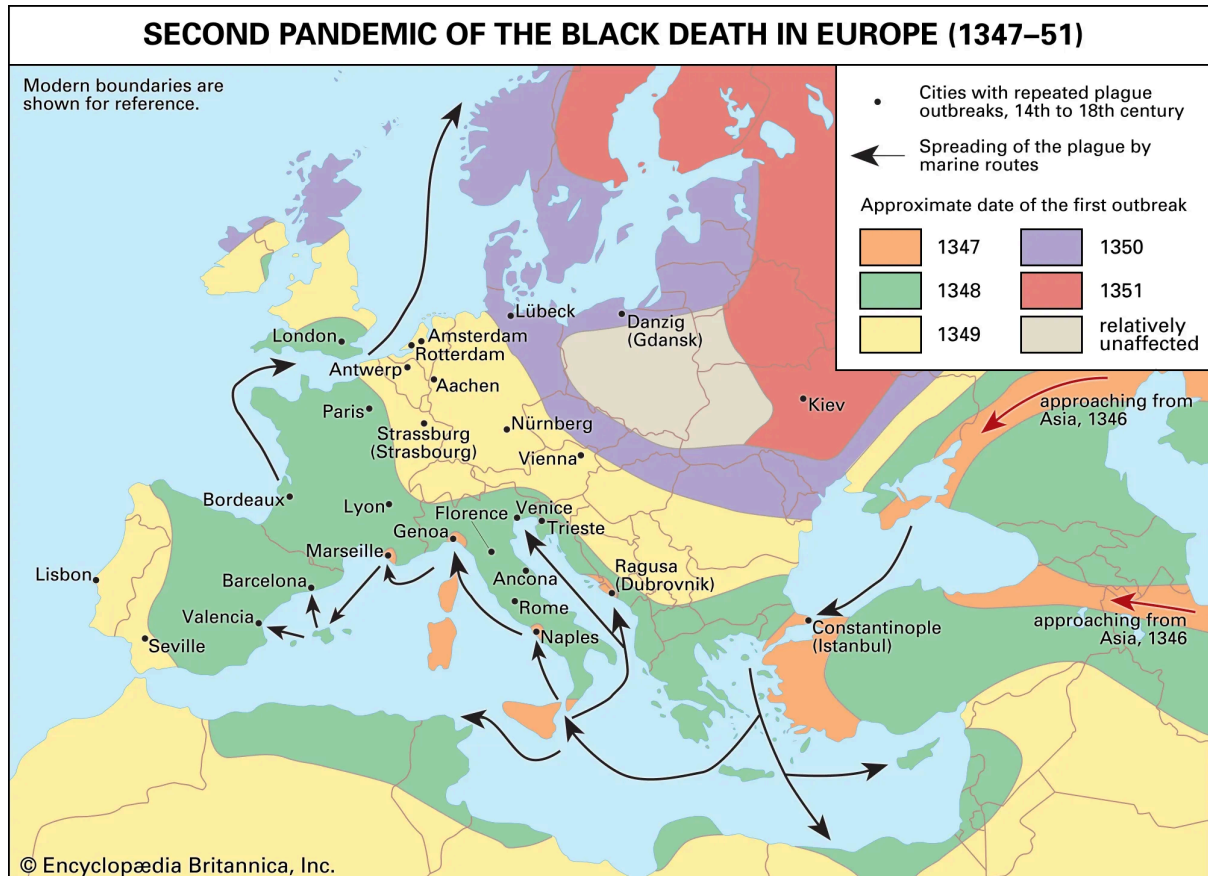
1. **The Plague:** an infectious disease caused by a bacterium (*Yersinia pestis*) transmitted from rodents to humans by the bite of infected fleas. After the course of a 7-day disease incubation, common symptoms could be fever, chills, head and body aches, weakness, vomiting, and nausea.
2. **The Black Death:** a pandemic in Europe between 1347 and 1351 caused by the plague. The consequences were greater than any other known epidemic or war at the time.
3. **Low Countries:** a coastal region of northwestern Europe, including Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. It is also known as the Benelux countries.
4. **Baltic Countries:** northeastern region of Europe, including Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea.

## Background information:

### The Origins and Spread of the Black Death:

The Black Death originated from China and Inner Asia and killed the army of the Kipchak Khan Janibeg when they were around the Genoese trading port of Kaffa in Crimea (1347). Then, Janibeg attempted to use infested corpses to infect his enemy. From Kaffa, Genoese ships carried the epidemic to the Sicilian port of Messina and inland, affecting Sicily (Italy). North Africa, mainland Italy, Spain, France, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, and the Low Countries. Then a ship from Canalis carried the




plague to Melcombe Regis, Dorset, and reached Bristol (England) and the southwestern counties of England. It also reached London, East Anglia, and Yorkshire. The Black Death also reached northern England, Scotland, Scandinavia, and the Baltic Countries. It is believed that the plague originated from Asia and was likely spread by trading ships, but researchers have shown the plague has origins in Europe as early as 3000 B.C.





The second pandemic of the Black Death in Europe (1347–51)

### Timeline of events:

Event and Date	Description of Events
<b>The famine before the plague</b>  [1339 - 46]	<p>1339-46, a series of cold winters and wet summers caused crops to fail, ending 2 centuries of relative peace and causing millions to starve.</p> <p>Political unrest led to class warfare &amp; political strife due to the lack of food.</p> <p>The black plague starts to spread through</p>

	<p>Western Europe. Reports of the plague appear in Cyprus, Sicily, and Alexandria.</p>
<p><b>The Plague Reaches Europe from China and Central Asia</b></p> <p>[1348]</p> 	<p>The Mongol emperor Janibeg attacked the Genoese trading port of Kaffa (now Feodosiya) in Crimea, and the Black Death spread from China and Central Asia to Europe, introducing the disease.</p> <p>To infect his adversaries, Janibeg launches the bodies of infected soldiers into the town as they perish from the illness. Genoese ships swiftly carried the plague inland from Kaffa by traveling west to the Mediterranean ports.</p>
<p><b>The Plague continues to spread in Europe</b></p> <p>[1348 - 50]</p> 	<hr/> <p>[48] The plague reaches North Africa, mainland Italy, Spain, England, and France.</p> <p>[48] A ship from Calais, France, carries the plague to Dorset, England, in August, spreading rapidly to the southwest countries</p> <hr/> <p>[49] The disease continues as it reaches Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, and the Low Countries (coastal region of northwestern Europe, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg)</p> <hr/> <p>[50] The plague reaches Scandinavia and</p>



	<p>the Baltic countries.</p> <hr/>
<p><b>Severity of the plague</b></p> <p>[1351]</p> 	<p>[51] By 1351, <math>\frac{1}{3}</math> of the Western European population perished (around 25 million people). Paris lost half its population (100,000 people).</p>
<p><b>Later Outbreaks</b></p> <p>[1361 - 75]</p> 	<p>Later outbreaks - 1361–63, 1369–71, and 1374–75 caused a further population decline.</p> <p>[70s] Wages soar as labor becomes scarce in the 1370s</p>

## The Consequences of the Black Death:

### Mortality Estimates and Long-term Population Effects

The study of contemporary archives suggests mortality varying in the different regions between  $\frac{1}{8}$  and  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the population. The French chronicler Jean Froissart's statement that about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of Europe's population

died in the epidemic may be fairly accurate. The population in England in 1400 was half what it had been 100 years earlier in that country alone; the Black Death certainly caused the depopulation or total disappearance of about 1,000 villages. A rough estimate is that 25 million people in Europe died from the plague during the Black Death. The population of Western Europe did not again reach its pre-1348 level until the beginning of the 15th century.

### **Immediate consequences**

The economy underwent abrupt and extreme inflation. Since it was difficult to procure goods through trade and to produce them, the prices of both goods produced locally and those imported from afar skyrocketed, leading to a slump in trade activities. For example, The Hundred Years' War between England and France was halted between 1349 and 1355 due to the massive population loss. As towns and armies were affected by the disease, military campaigns were disrupted for several years before it resumed later in the 1350s.

### **Agricultural Impact**

A more lasting and serious consequence was the drastic reduction of the amount of land under cultivation due to the deaths of so many laborers. Fields were left uncultivated and crops were allowed to rot while. With fewer alive and healthy laborers available, landowners struggled the most, as they had to substitute wages or money rents in place of labor services to try and keep their tenants.

### **Changes in Wages and Social Structure**

The death toll from the plague led to a significant reduction in the peasant population, creating a labor shortage that challenged the existing social hierarchy. High-status individuals faced the prospect of performing manual labor, which was previously considered beneath them. Many peasants actively resisted the roles assigned to them. They demanded higher wages and left jobs that did not meet their expectations, creating their agency in the labor market. Landowners tried to maintain control over wages and labor conditions through legislation (like the Ordinance and Statute of Labourers), which aimed to preserve pre-plague wage levels. However, these laws faced substantial resistance from laborers, who often ignored them, resulting in increased wages and a shift in the balance of power between landowners and workers.

### **Psychological Effects**

Civilians in the north of the Alps (not in Italy) faced heavy psychological effects. Ideas of death and the afterlife were shown in poetry, sculpture, and painting. The Roman Catholic Church lost some of its monopoly over the salvation of souls as people turned to mysticism and sometimes to excesses.

### **Rise of Anti-Semitism**

Anti-Semitism increased throughout Europe as Jews were blamed for the spread of the Black Death. As medical knowledge in the medieval period was extremely limited, people offered religious explanations for the catastrophe. The most popular explanations provided were of God punishing those who had sinned, or the Devil working to destroy Christianity. One popular anti-Jewish story suggested Jews had been recruited by the Devil to carry out this work. According to this slander, Jews had enthusiastically agreed, poisoning water wells to infect Christians with the disease. Despite the fact that Jews were also dying from the plague, people widely believed the story. Thousands of Jews were massacred as a result, and whole communities were wiped out across Europe. A wave of violent pogroms ensued, and entire Jewish communities were killed by mobs or burnt at the stake en masse.

### **Economic Decline in Siena**

Siena's economy faced a huge setback. The city's population was destroyed, the project of enlarging the cathedral was abandoned, and the death of many great painters, such as Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti, brought the development of the first Sienese school to a premature end.

## **Major Parties involved and Their Views:**

### **Kingdom of England**

Due to the aftermath of the Black Death, the British Government attempted economic adjustments such as setting maximum wages as the demand for labor soared, creating high economic and social tensions, which led to the [Peasants' Revolt](#). The government responded with mandated quarantines. In addition, the king instructed bishops to organize public displays of prayer and confession to seek divine intervention against the disease.

### **Kingdom of France**

King Philip VI ordered the University of Paris to create a significant work titled *Compendium de Epidemia*, which aimed to provide a framework for dealing with the plague. They enforced social distancing, quarantine, imposed trade embargoes, and prompt burials of the dead. Wide panic spread throughout France, and the people were looking for a scapegoat for the disease. Blamed for causing the diseases through poisoning wells in order to end Christianity, the Jewish community was heavily persecuted by both the people and the government.

### **Byzantine Empire**

With medical knowledge largely lagging behind, policies such as quarantine were ineffective. In the capital, Constantinople, the death of government officials due to the disease made governing the empire challenging. Overall, Constantinople lost  $\frac{2}{3}$  of its population, ranking second in casualties in its period. The sudden decrease in laborers made matters even worse. The empire faced threats from various enemies, including the Ottomans, Serbs, and Genoese, and had been weakened previously by internal conflicts.

### **Papal States**

Under the leadership of Pope Clement VI, the Papal states also faced significant changes as people turned to faith in mass panic, evident in practices such as [penance, indulgences, and mass for the dead, and more](#).

### **Mongol Empire:**

Although known for their role in spreading the plague with their early biological warfare (catapulting infected corpses into besieged cities), they were often forced to abandon their siege as the plague ravaged their ranks. Considering the significantly larger population China had during the time, the loss of population can't be underestimated.

## **Possible Solutions:**

### **Exorcism**

The Black Death is caused by evil spirits and bad air from the patient's body, so exorcism is the fundamental way to remove the bad spirits from their body. Other religious cures, like baptism, are also applied to cure the Black Death.

### **Vinegar with garlic, herbs, and spices:**



The mixture of vinegar, garlic, herbs, and spices is believed to prevent the spread of the Black Death. The mixture will be rubbed onto a person before they deal with the dead bodies caused by the Black Death.

### **Quarantine and social distancing:**

The most effective way of stopping any diseases, including the Black Death. The Black Death spreads through direct contact with infected body fluid, indirect contact through infected clothes worn by the patient, and bites from infected rats, so to stop the spread, the patients would be separated from society.

### **Bloodletting:**

Used to extract infected blood from the patient's body for healthy blood cells to reform. This was generally done using a blade (called a fleam), or by applying leeches. The blood would be drained into a bowl directly from the patient's vein, usually one found in the forearm or the neck.

### **Feces**

Feces were mixed up with other substances into a paste and pasted on the open wounds of the patient, then wrapped with a tight cloth to absorb all the disease and heal the wound.

### **Economic reforms:**

The declining population created a high demand for laborers, making serfdom harder to maintain as peasants demand higher wages. Some governments tried to maintain class orders by setting maximum wages and higher taxes.

## **Bibliography:s**

### **Useful links:**

1. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpGA6Qlb7\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpGA6Qlb7_c)

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