

# Cabinet of Medical Curiosities

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# INTRO

## Wondering About Objects of Wonder

allison | crawford



# *(Post) Colonial Medicine(s)*



As we celebrate transformation in medicine, and the wonder of innovation, it is humbling to think of the long voyage of medical discovery. The course that has been charted is often hidden in day-to-day practice.

From the crossed borders of ancient medical traditions - from Islam, Egypt and India - to the crossings of continents and contact with the new world that brought our diseases to Indigenous peoples and introduced us to new medicinal plants, medicine is a narrative of crossings and contacts.

Medicine is not just a story of innovation and the forward march of progress, but also, in the not too distant past, of mis-crossings, of encounters with others in which medical authority and power was not used judiciously. We did not always tread lightly.

By looking back, and looking inward, as well as looking forward, we can explore our past and our impact, and (en)counter the medical history of forgetting.

**To navigate:** touch or click on the linked images.

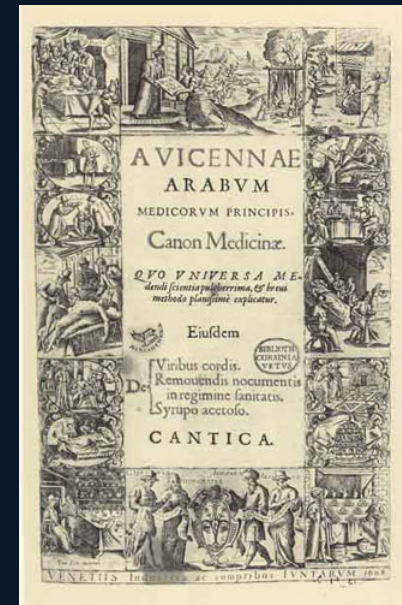
To return to the main page use the curio icon (bottom right).

To return to the map use the map icon (top right).





# Medical Travel



AVICENNA, or Ibn-Sīnā, the 11th-century Persian physician, wrote texts, including the Canon of Medicine, which were disseminated across medieval Europe, influencing the development of Western medicine. This early travel of medicine from Islam to the Western world heralded the global flow of medical knowledge.







*Forgotten expeditions...*







## *The New World*



Captain Cook's voyages to the New World led to the settlement of Jamestown in Virginia. The new land was fertile, as imagined through the inviting, fertile women that welcomed the settlers.

Native Americans shared their use of botanicals with European settlers; over time traditional medical knowledge of Indigenous peoples also mixed with the knowledge that slaves brought with them from Africa.

Local plants included boodroot (for skin sores) dandelion (as diuretic) lady's slipper (gynecologic problems and emotional disorders), yellow poplar (gastrointestinal upset), and sassafras (as a 'blood cleanser'), among others.

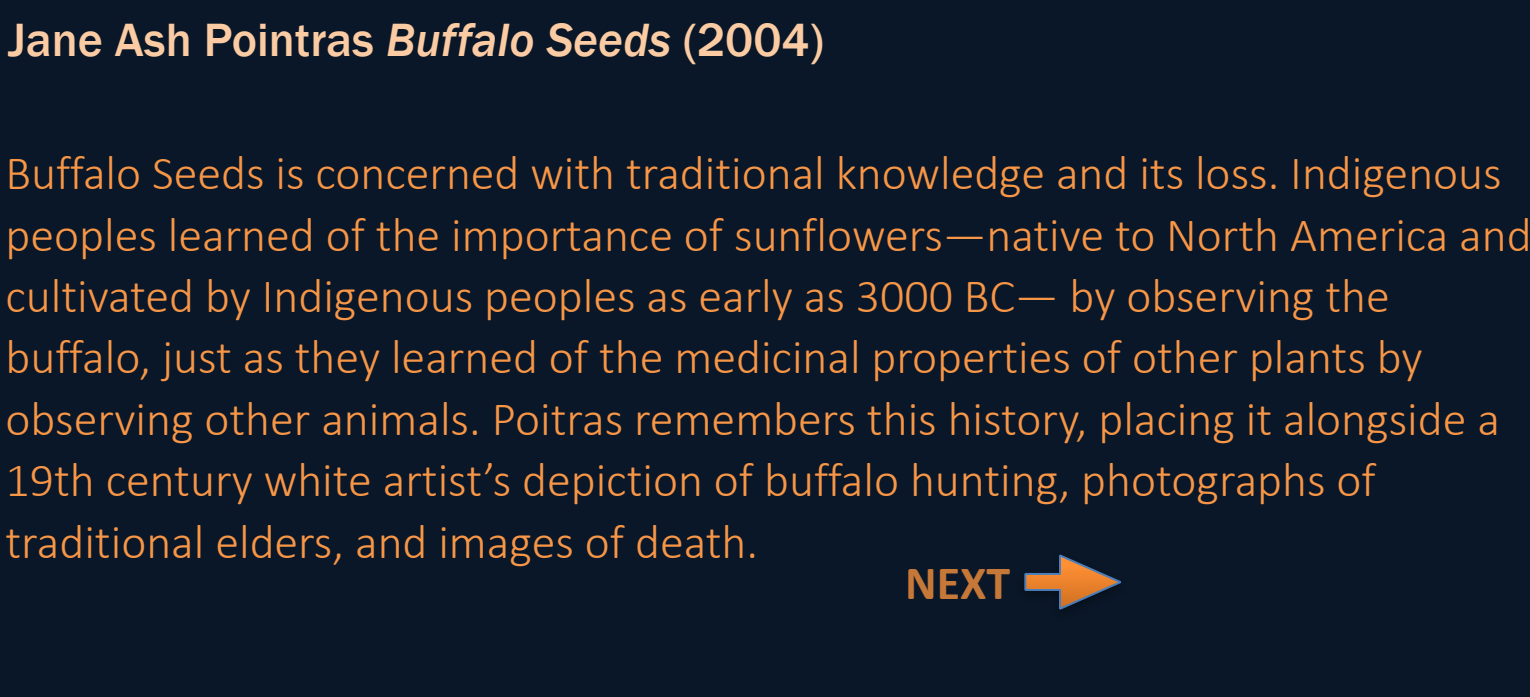


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## Traditional Indigenous Medicine



## Jane Ash Pointras *Buffalo Seeds* (2004)

## NEXT





# Fox Glove



Jane Ash Pointras  
**Its Good for Your Heart (2003)**



Foxglove was used in Indigenous medicine practices across North America. A group of medicines extracted from foxglove plants are called digitalin. The use of *D. purpurea* extract containing cardiac glycosides for the treatment of heart conditions was first described in the medical literature by William Withering, in 1785, which is considered the beginning of modern therapeutics.





## Slave Medicine



*An apothecary box filled with medicines to treat family members and slaves on a Cumberland County plantation in the early 1800s.*

In antebellum North Carolina, ownership of slaves included the right to direct their treatment when they were sick. As they did with their own families, slaveholders usually tried to treat sick and injured slaves themselves before consulting a physician. Doctors were called only for life-threatening cases.

Enslaved African Americans, who held different beliefs about the causes and treatment of illnesses, drew upon their own healing traditions. Many concealed ailments from their owners.

Some brought with them plants and seeds on their exilic voyage from West Africa, including liquorice seeds, used for inflammatory and GI complaints.

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# Immortal acts of discovery



Henrietta Lacks



Children and descendants of Henrietta Lacks

Henrietta Lacks was a young woman in Virginia, diagnosed with cervical cancer in 1951. Along with her pathology sample, another sample of normal cells was taken by Dr. Otto Gey, who was attempting to create a stem cell line at Johns Hopkins University. Unbeknownst to her or her family, Henrietta's cells were the only ones to be successfully replicated in a laboratory.

Henrietta's cells continue to yield the so-called immortal cell line, HeLa, used in biomedical research. Twenty years later, her family was approached with this information.

Although research ethics today would prevent such abuses what are we to make of this mortal mistake?



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A doctor draws blood from one of the Tuskegee test subjects.

The **Tuskegee syphilis experiment** was an infamous clinical study conducted from 1932-1972 by the US Public Health Service to study the natural progression of untreated syphilis in rural African-American men in Alabama. They were told they were receiving free healthcare from the US.

The legacy of slavery may be said to have continued to exert its influence on, and through, medicine. Although “freed” from slavery, these marginalized men were not deemed autonomous citizens with the right to informed consent.





# The Wonder of the Body of the Other



Early exploration, such as Frobisher's 16th-century Arctic voyages, began an ethnographic compulsion of charting not only the land, but the bodies of peoples "discovered" on these voyages. Understood at the time as scientific practices, this knowledge was then used to exert control over colonized populations. Practices of displaying people - from cabinets of curiosity, to circuses, to world fairs, continued for centuries. Many such artifacts still exist in museums and medical libraries around the world.



*"1577. Captaine Frobisher in a ship of our queenes. . . They brought likewise a man called Callicho and a woman named Ignorth. They were sauage people and fed only uppon raw flesh. The 9th. of October he rode in a little bote made of skinne in the water at the backe, where he killed 2 duckes with a dart, and when he had done carried his bote through the marsh upon his back. The like he did at the weare and other places, where many beheld him. He would hit a ducke a good distance of and not misse. They died here within a month."*

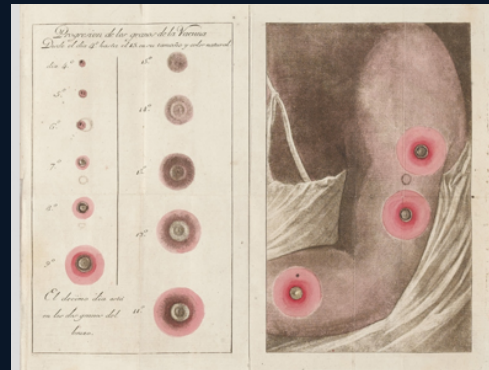




# Humanitarian medicine



Figura 6. La goleta "Maria Rita".



After Edward Jenner discovers a vaccine for smallpox, **The Balmis Expedition** (1803–1806), a three-year mission to the Americas led by Dr. Francisco Javier de Balmis, was deployed with the aim of vaccinating thousands against smallpox.

Jenner declares, *"I don't imagine the annals of history furnish an example of philanthropy so noble, so extensive as this."*

True...with the caveat that European explorers introduced the small pox they sought to eradicate, suggesting a complex relationship between colonialism and medicine.

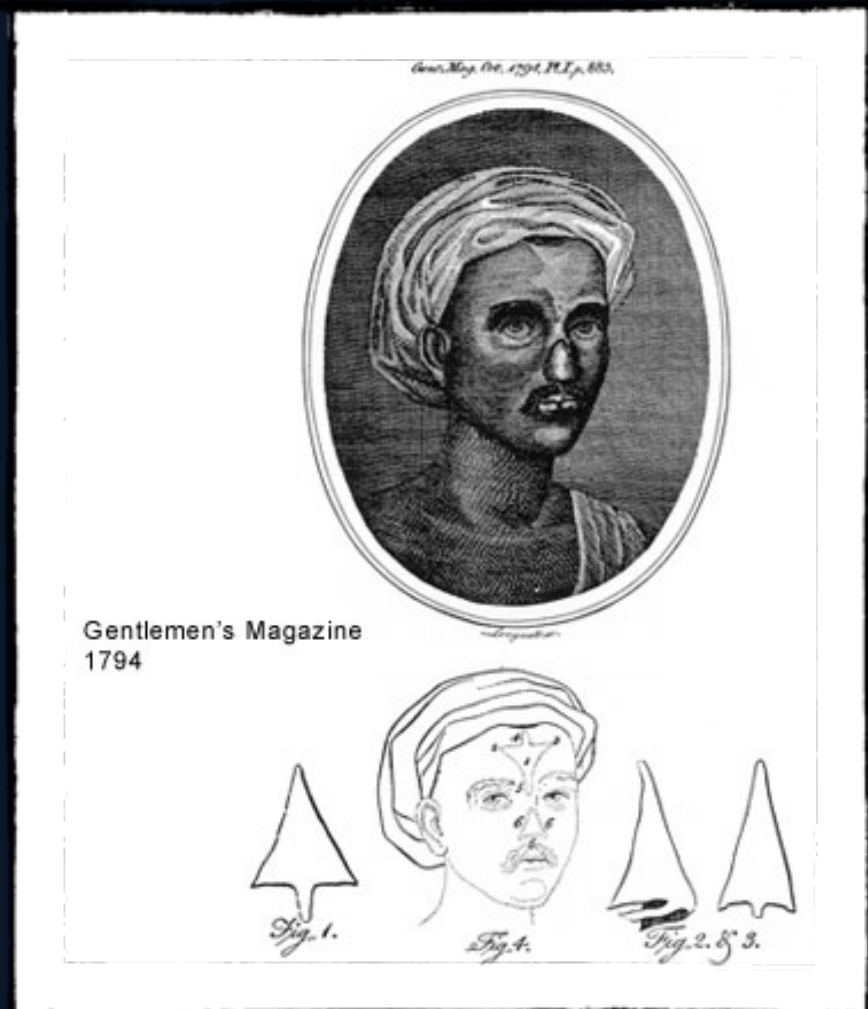






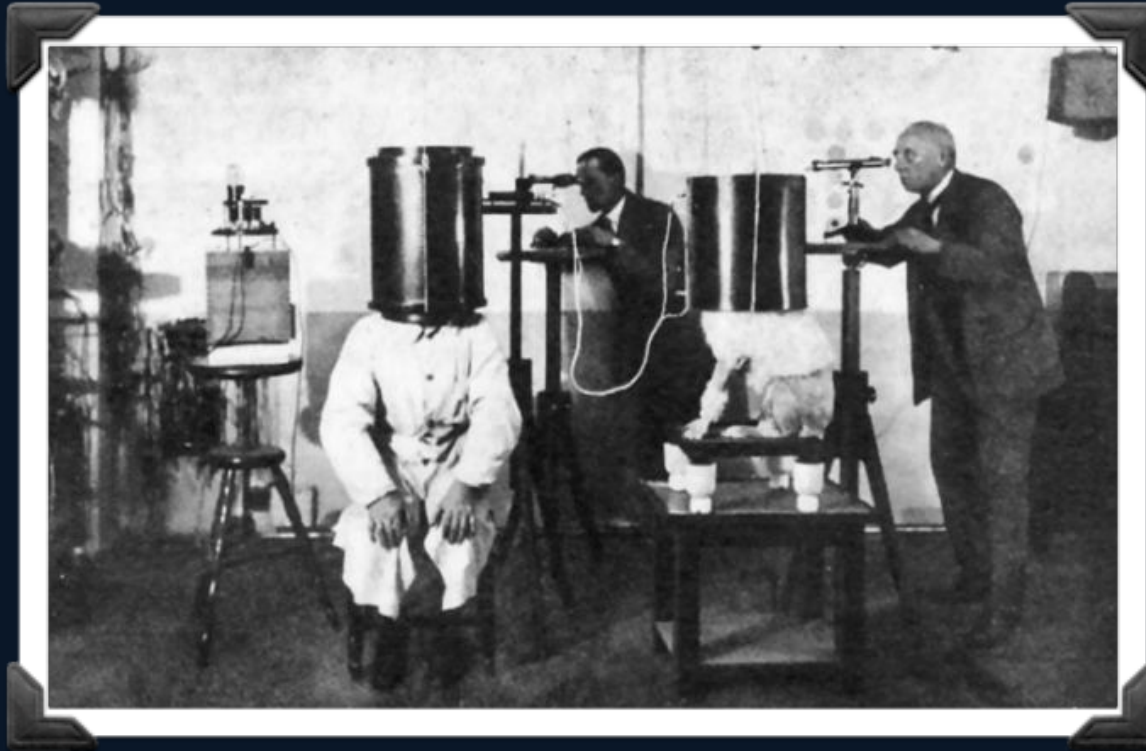
British physicians traveled to India to observe rhinoplasty being performed, and reports were published in the Gentleman's Magazine in 1794. Instruments described in the *Sushruta Samhita*, an Ayurvedic medical text, were modified in Europe.

Joseph Constantine Carpue studied plastic surgery in India for 20yrs until, in 1815, he was able to perform the first major rhinoplasty surgery in the western world.





# *Nazi experiments: Horrors of Discovery*



**Eugenics**, the social movement claiming to improve the genetic features of human populations through selective breeding and sterilization, was based on the idea that it is possible to distinguish between superior and inferior elements of society.

The practice of eugenics actually started in the US, but was implemented under the Nazi regime with horrifying institutional precision and scale.

Many Nazi doctors selected victims for murderous experiments that took the subject to the point of death. This could involve testing new vaccines by, for example, infecting healthy people with diseases. Details of this grim research were publicized at the

**Nuremberg Doctors Trial of 1946-47**, but there has never been reliable statistics on the number of experiments and victims.

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## CONTEMPORARY USE OF DATA FROM NAZI EXPERIMENTS

Dr. John Hayward, a Biology Professor at Victoria University, conducted hypothermia research utilizing a cooling curve of the human body, developed by a German physician, Rascher, through research on Holocaust victims.

According to Kristine Moe's survey in the Hasting Center Report, Hayward justified using the Nazi hypothermia data:

*"I don't want to have to use the Nazi data, but there is no other and will be no other in an ethical world. I've rationalized it a bit. But not to use it would be equally bad. I'm trying to make something constructive out of it. I use it with my guard up, but it's useful."*

K. Moe, *Should the Nazi Research Data be Cited?* Hasting Center Report, December, 1984 pp 5-7

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At the 1986 meeting of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology, Dr. Bernhard Bogerts presented his findings on the brains of people with schizophrenia based on the Brain Collection at the Vogt Institute of the Brain Research in Dusseldorf, West Germany, collected between 1928 and 1953.

The Brains of the Vogt Collection, Archives of General Psychiatry, August, 1988





# Atomic Powers: Research of the Conquerer

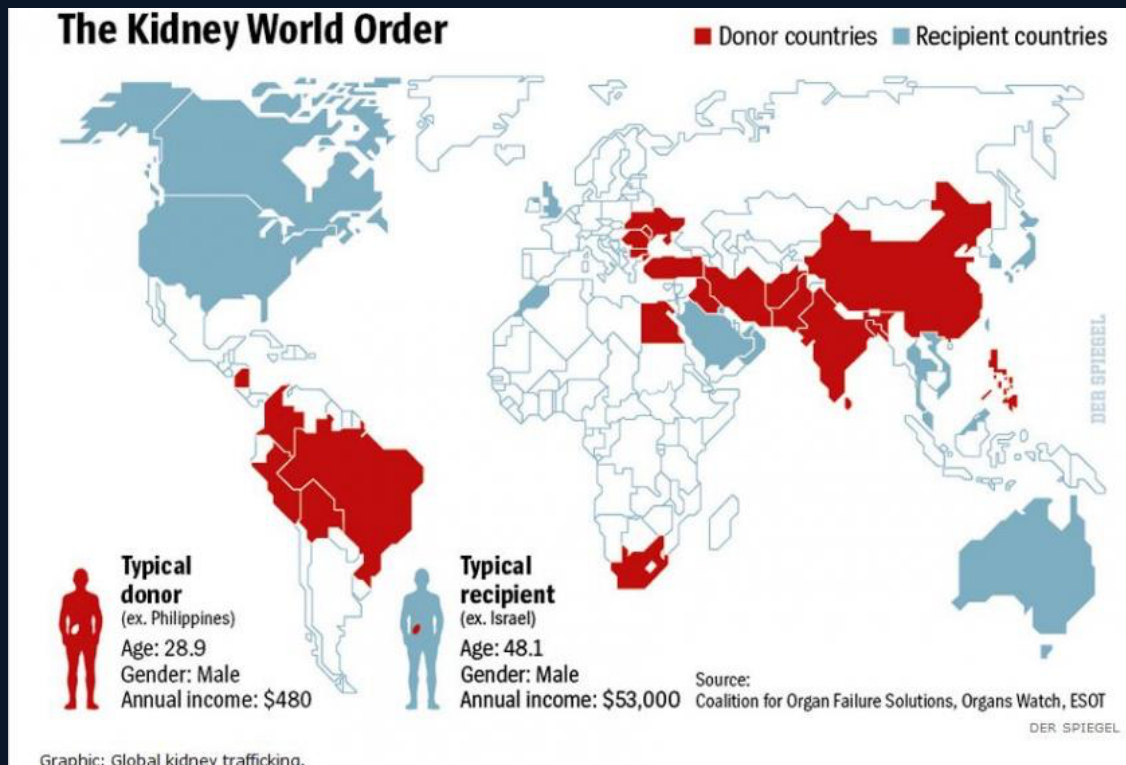


A young boy is examined by a US military doctor after being exposed to high levels of radioactive fallout from the Bravo test in the Marshall Islands on March 1, 1954. Much of what we know about radiation exposure was learned through the US study of their research subjects / conquered peoples.

The US opened a research institute to study radiation injury in 1947, which was handed over for collaboration with Japanese scientists in 1975.







Shimazono Y. The state of the international organ trade: a provisional picture based on integration of available information. World Health Organization Bulletin. 2007.



Our maps continue to be drawn and redrawn based on power. Power that is underwritten by trade and markets.







*The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is this storm.*

Walter Benjamin  
Theses on the Philosophy of History

In 1998 Anderson Warwick asked, *where is the postcolonial history of medicine?* It is still being written (and lived). As we celebrate discovery, innovation and transformation in medicine, how do we reconcile the rubble we have left in our wake? As we have explored, discovered, conquered, we have left some unintended consequences. These memories remain untended while we focus only on progress. This digital historical, medical journey, often visiting painful sites, is intended not as a reprimand (for haven't I benefited from the same legacy? wielded the same power?) but as a pause in the storm of progress.

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Radiation Effects Research Foundation <http://dels.nas.edu/global/nrsb/rerf>

