



When We Die : The Science, Culture, and Rituals of Death

Cedric A. Mims

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An unusually comprehensive study of death as both a social and scientific phenomenon, *When We Die* is as frank as it is informed. This far-reaching discussion considers mortality from the personal and the universal perspective, generously citing past and present poets and physicians from a diverse and telling range of traditions. Mims, who for two decades served as Professor of Microbiology at London's Guys Hospital, brings a humane, inquisitive, and learned sensibility to his topic. "This book is a light-hearted but wide-ranging survey of death, the causes of death, and the disposal of corpses," writes Mims. "It tells why we die and how we die, and what happens to the dead body and its bits and pieces. It describes the ways corpses are dealt with in different religions and in different parts of the world; the methods for preserving bodies; and the waysâ€”fascinating in their diversityâ€”in which corpses or parts of corpses are used and abused."

The volume also explores such crucial death-based notions as the afterlife, the soul, and the prospect of immortality. By way of the book's main focus, Mims continues: "We should take a more matter-of-fact view of death [and] accept it and talk about it more than we doâ€”as we have done with the once taboo subject of sex." This is a work that any student of social anthropology will find equally enlightening and essential.

When We Die : The Science, Culture, and Rituals of Death Details

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From Reader Review When We Die : The Science, Culture, and Rituals of Death for online ebook

Kelly says

An interesting – yet imperfect – overview of death & dying

In "When We Die," Biology Professor Cedric Mims provides a succinct overview of all things macabre. He touches upon standard death and dying subjects such as embalming, burial, cremation, organ donation, and bereavement, as well as more unusual topics, including cannibalism, cellular suicide, mummification, compostoriums, acid baths, and necrophilia. No stone is left unturned in his discussion of death, dying, and "the science, culture, and rituals of death."

As much as I enjoyed "When We Die," it was not without its flaws. For starters, it doesn't seem as though the book was properly edited. I wouldn't go as far to say that Mims is a BAD writer, but it could have been better. His misuse of commas, for instance, is atrocious. He also tends to have trouble transitioning between topics. Some of the awkwardness probably stems from the fact that Mims lives in England and spent some time in Australia and Africa. His phraseology can be clumsy and cumbersome, and I'm willing to bet that it's due to cultural differences. The book was initially released in the UK, and it doesn't appear to have been "cleaned up" for its US edition. Spelling and word usage differences remain intact, when his editor really should have changed them in the US version to reflect his new audience.

Additionally, I found some of his statements to be questionable, while other claims were just plain incorrect. For example, he says that \$6 million, "spent over 10 years," is enough to clean all the water in third world countries and eliminate deaths due to diarrhea (that estimate seems awfully low, no?). He also refers to the 1978 Jonestown massacre as a "mass suicide" (despite overwhelming evidence that many members were murdered outright), and makes the dubious claim that, "in all cases [of sensational homicides] the murderer is mentally deranged." Taken together, these errors made me question the rest of the information Mims included in "When We Die." Though he does list 4+ pages of references, he does not use footnotes in his text - so it's usually impossible to tell what information he pulled from which sources.

Nonetheless, "When We Die" is a fascinating and largely enjoyable read. Serious scholars may want to pass this one by, but it's an interesting and manageable discussion for laypeople.

<http://www.easyvegan.info/2005/06/01/...>

Meredith says

This book covered some interesting subjects relating to death but I only gave it two stars. To be honest, I would have given it another star if the author had refrained from expressing his opinion so much. It got rather old when he'd jump on his soapbox. I also didn't like how it jumped around. Granted, I am a HUGE fan of Mary Roach's book on death called Stiff, so perhaps I am a bit biased...

Metagion says

Excellent book dealing with every facet of the Last Journey: Death. Covered is everything from how the most ancient peoples dealt with death to modern times; causes of death (in the U.S. v. U. K.) with stats; burial customs; taking care of bodies after death (such as embalming); religious views and practices, and much more! Included are photos that help illustrate the topics at hand. A must read for thanatophiles (death lovers)!

Aaron Plunk says

When the author implies the book is backed up by sources in the opening, usually a sign of a not well researched book. Could not finish this book.

Sue says

This was good, actually got better as one went along, like the last third.

Gwen Stacy says

Very well written and comprehensive review of the major topics surrounding death presented in a scientific manner without sensationalism. I really enjoyed this book and recommend it as one of the better books out there on this topic. I plan to buy this book and reference it often!
