

HST 388B:

Disease and Public Health in American History

Description and Learning Goals

Disease has never been merely a biological phenomenon. Instead, all diseases—including COVID-19—are also social phenomena: in their origins, in their definition, in their spread, in their impacts, and in the responses they engender among different groups of people. The way we understand disease is shaped by culture, and, at the same time, epidemic disease often reshapes the society around it. This course aims to analyze the many ways that disease, medical theory, public health practice, and policy have shaped the American experience, with an emphasis on the late nineteenth through the early twenty-first centuries. We will consider how disease has been understood at different times; how disease has been employed as a metaphor in political rhetoric; how ideas about immunity and susceptibility have produced understandings of race, citizenship, and national belonging; how epidemic events have mobilized initiatives in public health and health activism; and how tropes of communicable disease have manifested in American popular culture. At the end of the quarter, we will consider how history helps us to understand some of the many issues surrounding COVID-19.

Learning goals for this course include (1) to develop a basic knowledge of the history of disease and public health in American history; (2) to understand how and why disease has been understood in certain ways at certain moments, and to recognize what the impacts of those understandings have been; (3) to refine discussion skills in a seminar/zoom setting; (4) to gain experience with the analysis of both primary and secondary historical sources; and (5) to learn how to prepare a historical research proposal.

Books and Readings

The following books are available for purchase at the University Bookstore and/or are available as an ebook through the UW libraries.

Nash, Linda. *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Rosenberg, Charles E. *The Cholera Years; the United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962.

Biss, Eula. *On Immunity: An Inoculation*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014. [Note: This title is not available as an UW Libraries ebook; you will have to purchase a copy.]

In addition, there will be several shorter required readings (articles and chapters) and videos available electronically via either the UW libraries or the course Canvas page. If you have any issues accessing the readings, please let me know right away.

Requirements

Participation: Active and engaged participation in discussions is one of the major requirements of the course. The quality of the course ultimately depends upon the efforts of everyone in the class. Because participation is so vital to making this course a success, participation will account for 25% of the course grade.

I recognize that you may need to miss one or more classes for personal reasons and that the pandemic places additional burdens on many of us. If you miss a class, you may prepare a 300-500 word response to the readings for that day as a make-up for the missed participation; you may do this one time. If you must miss additional classes, please contact me to discuss your situation.

Discussion Leader: Each member of the seminar will be responsible for leading off our discussion at one session during the quarter.

Reading Reflection: Students are required to write one reading reflection for 5 different class sessions (approximately one every other week). These posts can address any session except for 1/14, 1/19, 2/11. These reflections should be 75-200 words and should be submitted on Canvas prior to that day's discussion.

Papers: There will be 3 paper assignments in this class. Paper #1 will be based on course readings. Paper #2 will be based on course readings and two to three additional (short) primary sources. Paper #3 will be a research proposal. Additional information about each of the papers will be provided. A penalty of 1/2 grade (0.5 grade point) will be assessed on papers not submitted on time. An additional penalty of 0.5 will be assessed the following week and each passing week.

Grading:

Participation (in-class discussions, writing assignments, group work): 25%

Discussion Lead: 5%

Reading Responses: 15%

Papers 1 and 2: 15% each

Research Proposal: 25%

A Note on Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct, and ultimately it devalues both the person who engages in it and the broader learning environment in this course and the university. True intellectual work requires the free, open, and honest exchange of ideas. It is my sincere hope that no

one in this course will be tempted to plagiarize any portion of their assignments. To avoid the possibility of that temptation, begin your assignments early; ask questions about anything you are unsure of; and ask for any kind of help that you need. In addition to the professor, there are several other sources of help for writing assignments available on campus.

The Committee on Academic Conduct in the College of Arts and Sciences has defined plagiarism in the following way: using another writer's words without proper citation; using another writer's ideas without proper citation; citing your source but reproducing the exact words of a printed source without quotation marks, or, borrowing the structure of another author's phrases or sentences without crediting the author from whom it came; borrowing all or part of another student's paper or using someone else's outline to write your own paper; using a paper writing "service" or having a friend write the paper for you.

The obligation to properly cite the work of others applies to internet, oral, and written sources. A good rule of thumb is: *"The key to avoiding plagiarism is that you show clearly where your own thinking ends and someone else's begin."* A great website that defines the problem and discusses how to avoid plagiarism can be found at https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/index.html. If a student submits a paper in which significant portions have been plagiarized, the student's submission will be forwarded to the Dean's representative on Academic Misconduct. If plagiarism is confirmed, the paper will be treated as not completed; the student will receive a 0 for the paper.

Learning Support and Accommodations

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with Disability Resources for Students (DRS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or uwdrs@uw.edu or disability.uw.edu. ([Links to an external site.](#)) DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

The UW also offers accommodations of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities in accordance with state law. The UW's policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at [Religious Accommodations Policy \(https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/\)](https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/) ([Links to an external site.](#)). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form \(https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/\)](https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/) ([Links to an external site.](#))."

Writing Resources

All of the writing centers below offer remote services. If you think you would like to make use of these resources, I advise making an appointment online as early as possible. (You can always cancel.)

- The [History Writing Center](#) is open to History majors, to students writing papers for History courses, and to Evening Degree students.
- The [Odegaard Writing and Research Center](#) (OWRC) offers 45 minute appointments on any writing assignment ranging from an academic essay to personal statements.
- The Center for Learning and Undergraduate Enrichment's (CLUE) [Writing Center](#) has writing tutors available throughout the weekdays at various times.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

Jan 5: Introduction

Jan 7: Framing Disease

Rosenberg, Charles E., "Explaining Epidemics" in Rosenberg, *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 293-304.

Aronowitz, Robert. "Framing Disease: An Underappreciated Mechanism for the Social Patterning of Health." *Social Science & Medicine* 67, no. 1 (July 1, 2008): 1–9.

Jan 12: Framing Disease: The McKeown Thesis

Colgrove, James. "The McKeown Thesis: A Historical Controversy and Its Enduring Influence." *American Journal of Public Health* 92, no. 5 (May 2002): 725–29.

Szreter, Simon. "The Population Health Approach in Historical Perspective." *American Journal of Public Health* 93, no. 3 (March 2003): 421–31.

Jan 14: Colonization

Blackbird, Andrew. "White-Man Giver." Lapham's Quarterly.
<https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/medicine/white-man-giver>.

Crosby, Alfred W. "Virgin Soil Epidemics as a Factor in the Aboriginal Depopulation in America." *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser. 33, no. issue? (1976): 289–99.

Jones, David S. "Virgin Soils Revisited." *William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2003): 703–42.

Estes, Nick. "The Empire of All Maladies | Nick Estes." The Baffler, July 2020.
<https://thebaffler.com/salvos/the-empire-of-all-maladies-estes>.

Jan 19: Colonization-continued

Nash, Linda. *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, Ch. 1 & 2, pp. 16-81.

Jan 21: Epidemics and Society: Cholera

Rosenberg, Charles E. *The Cholera Years; the United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962, Part 1, pp. 1-98.

Jan 25: Paper #1 Due @9:00 a.m.

Jan 26: Epidemics and Society-continued

Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*, Part II-III, pp. 101-234.

Jan 28: The “New Public Health”

Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies*, Ch. 3, pp. 82-126.

Feb 2: Public Health and Stigmatization

Stern, Alexandra, and Howard Markel. “Which Face? Whose Nation? Immigration, Public Health, and the Construction of Disease at America’s Ports and Borders, 1891 to 1928.” In *Immigration Research for a New Century: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 21, 2000. [17 pp.]

Molina, Natalia. “Borders, Laborers, and Racialized Medicalization.” In *Precarious Prescriptions*, edited by Laurie B. Green, John Mckiernan-González, and Martin Summers, 167–84. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Baynton, Douglas C. “Defectives in the Land: Disability and American Immigration Policy, 1882-1924.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 24, no. 3 (March 22, 2005): 31–45.

Feb 4: Race and Racism in Medicine & Public Health

Dorothy Roberts, The Betsy Wood Knapp ‘64 Lecture: “The Problem with Race-Based Medicine,” June 18, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYODZmiXgWg>

Godey, Maria. “Is It Time For A Race Reckoning In Kidney Medicine?” NPR.org, December 28, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/12/28/949408943/is-it-time-for-a-race-reckoning-in-kidney-medicine>.

Feb 9: Race and Racism in Public Health: Tuskagee

Brandt, Allan. "Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskagee Syphilis Experiment." In *Tuskagee's Truths: Rethinking the Tuskagee Syphilis Study*, 15-33.

Reverby, Susan M. "Invoking 'Tuskegee': Problems in Health Disparities, Genetic Assumptions, and History." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 21, no. 3 (August 2010): 26–34.

Feb 11: Spanish Flu

Crosby, Alfred W. *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, Ch. 4 & 5, pp. 45-69.

Burg, Steven. "Wisconsin and the Great Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 84, no. 1 (2000): 36–56.

Gamble, Vanessa Northington. "'There Wasn't a Lot of Comforts in Those Days': African Americans, Public Health, and the 1918 Influenza Epidemic." *Public Health Reports* 125, no. Suppl 3 (2010): 114–22.

Browse: "The American Influenza Epidemic of 1918: A Digital Encyclopedia." University of Michigan Center for the History of Medicine. <https://www.influenzaarchive.org/>.

Feb 16: Environments and Disease

Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies*, Ch. 4, 5, Conclusion, pp. 127-215.

Colwell, Rita R. "Global Microbial Ecology of *Vibrio Cholerae*." In *Oceans and Health: Pathogens in the Marine Environment*, edited by Shimshon Belkin and Rita R. Colwell, 297–305. Springer US, 2005.

Feb 18: Vaccination

Colgrove, James. "Between Persuasion and Compulsion: Smallpox Control in Brooklyn and New York, 1894-1902." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 78, no. 2 (2004): 349–78.

Brandt, Allan M. "Polio, Politics, Publicity, and Duplicity: Ethical Aspects in the Development of the Salk Vaccine." *International Journal of Health Services* 8, no. 2 (April 1978): 257–70.

[Start reading: Biss, Eula. *On Immunity*.]

Recommended: Fisher, Richard. "The Fiasco of the 1976 'Swine Flu Affair.'" BBC Future, September 21, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200918-the-fiasco-of-the-us-swine-flu-affair-of-1976>.

Feb 23: Vaccination--continued

Biss, Eula. *On Immunity: An Inoculation*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2014.

Feb 25: No Class

Feb 26: Paper #2 Due @5:00 p.m.

Mar 2: AIDS: Origin Stories

Carmichael, Mary. "The Virus - How It Began - HIV Before The Age Of Aids." PBS: Frontline. The Age of AIDS, May 30, 2006. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/aids/virus/origins.html>.

Iliffe, John. "Origins," "Epidemic in Western Equatorial Africa," and "Causation: A Synthesis" in *The African Aids Epidemic: A History*. Boydell & Brewer, 2006, pp. 3-9, 58-64.

Pepin, Jacques. "Legacies of Colonial Medicine I," "Legacies of Colonial Medicine II," and "Epilogue" in *The Origins of AIDS*. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 114-167, 235-237.

Mar 4: Public Health Activism

Lerner, Barron H. *The Breast Cancer Wars: Hope, Fear, and the Pursuit of a Cure in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, Chs. 7 & 8, pp. 144-195.

Epstein, Steven. "The Construction of Lay Expertise: AIDS Activism and the Forging of Credibility in the Reform of Clinical Trials." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 20, no. 4 (October 1995): 408-37.

Recommended: France, David. *How to Survive a Plague* [film], 2012. [Available through UW libraries.]

Mar 9: COVID-19: Causes and Effects

Morens, David M., Joel G. Breman, Charles H. Calisher, Peter C. Doherty, Beatrice H. Hahn, Gerald T. Keusch, Laura D. Kramer, James W. LeDuc, Thomas P. Monath, and Jeffery K. Taubenberger. "The Origin of COVID-19 and Why It Matters." *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 103, no. 3 (September 2, 2020): 955-59.
<http://offcampus.lib.washington.edu/login?url=https://doi.org/10.4269/ajtmh.20-0849>

Liu, Andrew. "'Chinese Virus,' World Market." *N+1* (blog), March 20, 2020.

<https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/chinese-virus-world-market/>.

Martin, Nina, and Akilah Johnson. "How COVID-19 Hollowed Out a Generation of Young Black Men." *ProPublica*, December 22, 2020. <https://www.propublica.org/article/how-covid-19-hollowed-out-a-generation-of-young-black-men?token=XSO7CCiM7D0udJrFYQeZnvAitR3ZT0sj>.

Mar 11: No Class

Mar 16: Paper #3 Due @ 9:00 a.m.