Contagion: history and culture
HSTY6988

Semester II, 2004
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Seminar meeting, Thursdays 6-8 pm The Meeting Room, Ground Floor, Mills Building

Summary and Objectives
In 'Contagion' we will study the history of communicable diseases. This means reading about the fascinating historical ideas of contamination, hygiene, epidemic, plague, blood, hysteria, colonisation, immunity, resistance, virus and more. The management of certain diseases — cholera, smallpox, syphilis, plague — was central to the formation of early western public health institutions. The bureaucratic and biomedical management of epidemics was thus closely related to the formation and changing nature of states, of nations, and of empires in the modern period. As in our current moment, diseases and public health always worked around questions of the individual, the public good and the assessment of risk and security. Themes of liberal government and commerce thus run through the unit. Diseases have also long been managed spatially, through varying measures of segregation, and concern about contact and exchange. This theme also runs through the unit. We will read abstractly and substantively about concepts like epidemic,

We will read many historians' accounts of various diseases and epidemics, looking not only at empirical information about them, but also at how this has been interpreted: historiography.

The unit is structured in 3 blocks of work: introductory weeks; a major block on specific diseases; and a final block on contagion and world history. While of course nearly all the diseases and microbes to be studied were active through most of the period under question, certain diseases came to be politically, epidemiologically, or culturally significant at certain points. I have arranged these (week 3-10) broadly chronologically.

Seminars and Readings
Each week there are 3 required readings. The first is a primary document — an article, poster, letter, government document or pamphlet from the historical period we are studying that week. We will be reading these documents closely in order to gain skills in historical interpretation. The second reading is a contextualising and information-based secondary article or chapter. The third is an article or chapter selected for its interpretive argument. It is intended to be more challenging, and to demonstrate the possibilities of thinking about contagion through social or cultural theories. I have selected additional readings for each topic for further use in preparing for seminars and in particular for essays.
Assessment
1. A 1,000 word seminar paper, comparing two different historical approaches to the topic. This is due the week after your present your work.
2. A 4-5,000 word research paper on a topic and question of your choice. This is due 8 November 2004. Please submit in hard copy only either to the School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry Office, to my pigeonhole, or to Jill Gordon for Medical Humanities students. Ensure you keep a copy.

On the process and conventions of research, writing and citing historical work, please consult the guidelines drawn up by the Department of History and available on the Department's website.

Secondary sources
• Historical research does not lend itself to a 'textbook' approach, but requires wide and deep reading across the work of many historians. I have selected a list of additional readings for each topic to begin your research. The bibliographies of the articles and chapters in the readings will provide links to related literature.
• For further research I recommend the database of secondary literature CLIO. This offers abstracts of articles and some books, and often direct electronic access to download them. This database is divided into 'America: history and life' and 'Historical Abstracts' (ie history on the rest of the world!). CLIO can be found in the University Library website, electronic resources. Other databases can also be located there.
• Use keywords carefully to find related books in the University collection.
• The journals of record in this field are: Medical History, Bulletin of the History of Medicine, the Social History of Medicine.

Primary sources: There are many fascinating primary documents available in Sydney to form the core of your essays. You may choose to do a close reading of one, or of a selection. The University holds many 19th and 20th century medical and public health texts. Many are on open access in Fisher, Burkitt-Ford or the Medical Libary. Others are in the Rare Book Collection in Fisher, or held separately by the Librarians. Old journals are available (for example, The Eugenics Review, The Journal of State Medicine, Public Health in the Stack of Burkitt-Ford, The Australasian Medical Gazette, 19th century issues of BMJ and The Lancet, are held by the Medical Library. Look also for government documents often bound in published Parliamentary Papers — for example, the 1915 NSW Select Committee on VD, the 1881 Royal Commission on the Quarantine Station. The Royal College of Physicians Library holds an extensive historical collection. Access through the College Librarian. The Mitchell Library holds Australian published and archival material. I always find the card catalogue is useful to search under subjects, as well as the database. The NSW State Library (as opposed to the Mitchell wing) holds published historical material from elsewhere in the world. Really keen students can access the many old government records related to infectious diseases at the NSW State Archives, the Rocks or Kingswood.
Program of seminars

BLOCK ONE: INTRODUCTORY CONCEPTS
Week 1  29 July
Disease and public health: thinking historically and culturally

Week 2  5 August
Understanding ‘contagion’ in the past

PART TWO: DISEASES
Week 3  12 August
Plague: early modern responses

Week 4  19 August
Smallpox: 18th century inoculation and 19th century anti-vaccinationism

Week 5  26 August
Cholera: Europe, 1832

Week 6  2 September
Venereal Disease: Britain and the Contagious Diseases Acts, c. 1860

Week 7  9 September
Leprosy: segregation and colonialism, c. 1900-1940

Week 8  16 September
Malaria: the institutions of tropical medicine, c. 1900

Week 9  23 September
Tuberculosis: the sanatorium in the early to mid twentieth century

BREAK 27 September – 3 October

Week 10  7 October
Influenza: the world in 1918

BLOCK THREE: CONTAGION AND WORLD HISTORY
Week 11  14 October
Contagion, colonialism and the 'new world', c.1500-1800

Week 12  21 October
Quarantine and the history of modern nationalism

Week 13  28 October
Contagion, globalisation and biosecurity, 1950-2001
Week 1  29 July

HISTORY, CULTURE AND DISEASE

Required Reading

Further Reading


Week 2  5 August
UNDERSTANDING 'CONTAGION' IN THE PAST

Primary Document

Required Reading


Further reading:


Week 3  12 August

PLAGUE Document

Sir John Colbatch, *A Scheme for Proper Methods to be taken should it please God to visit us with the Plague*, London, 1721.

Required Reading


Further Reading
On plague in early modern Europe
Carlo M. Cipolla, *Fighting the Plague in Seventeenth Century Italy*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1981.

On global plague c. 1896-1902
Peter Curson and Kevin McCracken, *Plague in Sydney: The Anatomy of an Epidemic*, University of New South Wales Press,
Week 4 19 August
SMALLPOX

Document

Required Reading


Further Reading


Week 5  26 August

CHOLERA

Document

H. Young, Remarks on the Cholera Morbus: containing a description of the disease, its symptoms, causes and treatment together with suggestions as to the best means of guarding against its attack, Smith, Elder & Co., London, 1831.

Required Reading


Further Reading


Francois Delaporte, Disease and Civilization: The Cholera in Paris, 1832.


Catherine J. Kudlick, 'Giving is Deceiving: Cholera, Charity and the Quest for Authority in 1832' French Historical Studies, 18, 2 (1993): 457-81.


Week 6  2 September
VENEREAL DISEASES

Document

Required Reading


Film
*Fight Syphilis*, US Public Health Service, 1942 (9 mins). Courtesy the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, USA.

Further Reading


Judith Smart, 'Sex, the State and the Scarlet Scourge: gender, citizenship and venereal diseases regulation in Australia during the Great War' *Women's History Review*, 7, 1 (1998): 5-36.


Week 7  9 September

LEPROSY

Document/Film

Required Reading


Further Reading


Week 8  16 September

MALARIA: The Institutions of Tropical Medicine
Document:

Required Reading:


Further Reading
Michael Worboys, 'Germs, Malaria and the Invention of Mansonian Tropical Medicine: From 'Diseases in the Tropics' to 'Tropical Diseases' in David Arnold (ed.) *Warm Climates and Western Medicine: the emergence of tropical medicine, 1500-1900*, Rodopi, 1996, pp. 181-207.


On Australian Tropical Medicine


David Walker, ‘Climate, Civilization and Character in Australia, 1880-1940’, *Australian Cultural History*, no. 16, 1997/98, pp. 77-95

Week 9 23 September

TUBERCULOSIS

Document

**Required Reading**


**Film**

*They Do Come Back*, c. 1940. The [US] National Tuberculosis Association (17 mins). Courtesy the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda

**Further Reading**


BREAK 27 September – 3 October

**Week 10 7 October**

**INFLUENZA**

**Required Reading**


**Further Reading**


Week 11  14 October
CONTAGION, COLONIALISM AND THE 'NEW WORLD'

Required Reading


Further Reading


Week 12  21 October
QUARANTINE AND THE HISTORY OF MODERN NATIONALISM

Document/Film
*Prevention of the introduction of diseases from abroad*, US Public Health Service, 1946. Courtesy the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda.

Required Reading


Further Reading


Bernard Harris, ‘Pro-alienism, anti-alienism and the medical profession in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain’ in Waltraud Ernst and Bernard Harris (eds) *Race, science and medicine, 1700-1960*, Routledge, 1999.

Week 13  28 October
CONTAGION, GLOBALISATION AND BIOSECURITY

Document/Film
The Truth About Biological Warfare (1951) Dumont Television Network/Johns Hopkins University. 29 mins. Courtesy, the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda Md.

Required Reading


Further Reading


Edmund Russell, War and nature: fighting humans and insects with chemicals from World War 1 to Silent Spring.