

Narratives of Illness

Professor Jim Downs

Fall 2022

Course Description

This interdisciplinary course has two objectives: first, to investigate the various ways that the medical profession, patients, and the state narrate illness; second, to chart the history of medicine and public health, paying particular attention to the changing roles of doctors, the history of disease causation, and how these two phenomena overlap, especially in the mid to late nineteenth century. Drawing heavily on primary sources, the course begins with an overview of the history of medicine from the colonial period to the present in the United States, covering a range of subjects from outbreaks of yellow fever and smallpox to tuberculosis and HIV. Special attention will be given to how biosocial factors, namely racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia, shape both the outbreak and outcome of these epidemics.

After developing this foundation, the second half of the course will draw on work of medical anthropologists and medical humanities scholars to probe the theoretical and conceptual understandings of how biomedical and rhetorical frameworks make disease visible, and how physicians, the state, and patients each develop their own narratives to explain disease. While the first half of the course will be situated mostly in the U.S. and Europe, the readings from the second half of the course will include case studies from Africa, Asia, and South America.

Course Readings

1. Downs, Jim. *Maladies of Empire: How Colonialism, Slavery and War Transformed Medicine*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2021.
2. Downs, Jim. *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
3. Kleinman, Arthur. *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.
4. Olivarius, Kathryn. *Necropolis: Disease, Power, and Capitalism in the Cotton Kingdom*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2022.
5. Reis, Elizabeth. *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
6. Rosenberg, Charles E. *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.
7. Royles, Dan. *To Make the Wounded Whole: The African-American Struggle against HIV/AIDS*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2020.
8. Walzer-Leavitt, Judith. *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page historiographical paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives

1. Investigate the various ways that the medical profession, patients, and the state narrate illness
2. Chart the history of medicine and public health, paying particular attention to the changing roles of doctors, the history of disease causation, and how these two phenomena overlap, especially in the mid to late nineteenth century

Class Schedule

Week 1: September 22: Introduction and History of Medicine in the Colonial Period and Early Republic

Readings

- John Harley Warner and Janet A. Tighe, eds., *Major Problems in the History of American Medicine and Public Health: Documents and Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001). (A link to these readings can be found in the Week 1 module.)
 - Rosner and Reverby, "Medical History and Historical Practice," pp. 3–8
 - Patterson, "Disease in the History of Medicine and Public Health," pp. 17–23
 - Read the documents in Chapter 1
 - Read the documents and review essays in Chapter 2
 - Read the documents and review essays in Chapter 3

Assignments

- Discussion Board One
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Week 2: September 29: The Changing Role of the Physician and Medicine

Readings

- Warner and Tighe (A link to these readings can be found in the Week 2 module.)
 - Read the documents and review essays in Chapter 4
 - Read the documents and review essays in Chapter 5

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
 - Short Paper One due October 5
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 3: October 6: Antebellum Medicine and Yellow Fever Epidemics

Readings

- Olivarius, *Necropolis* (all)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
 - Final Paper/Project Question due October 12
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final paper or project will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.
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Week 4: October 13: The Rise of Epidemiology

Readings

- Downs, *Maladies of Empire* (all)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
 - Short Paper Two due October 19
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 5: October 20: Cholera, Sanitation, and Reconfiguring Scientific Medicine

Readings

- Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years* (all)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Five
 - Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due October 26
 1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback AND
 2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.
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Week 6: October 27: Smallpox and the Civil War: The Largest Biological Crisis of the Nineteenth Century

Readings

- Downs, *Sick from Freedom* (all)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Six
 - Short Paper Three due November 2
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 7: November 3: Germ Theory and the Rise of Biomedical Science

Readings

- Warner and Tighe (A link to these readings can be found in the Week 7 module.)
 - o Read the documents in Chapter 8
 - o Read group 5 of the essays in Chapter 8

Assignments

- Discussion Board Seven
 - Short Paper Four due November 9
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 8: November 10: Doctors Narrating Illness

Readings

- Walzer-Leavitt, *Typhoid Mary* (all)
- Steven Soderbergh, dir., *Contagion*, produced by Michael Shamberg, Stacey Sher, and Gregory Jacobs, Participant Media, 2011. (A link to this video can be found in the Week 8 module.)

Assignments

- Paper/Project Preview due November 16
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper
 - Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
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Week 9: November 17: Patients Narrating Illness

Readings

- Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives* (all)
- Jean-Marc Vallée, dir., *Dallas Buyers Club*, produced by Robbie Brenner and Rachel Winter, Truth Entertainment and Voltage Pictures, 2013. (A link to this video can be found in the Week 9 module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Eight
 - Short Paper Five due November 23
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.
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Week 10: November 24: Medicine Narrating Gender

Readings

- Reis, *Bodies in Doubt* (all)

Assignments

- Rough Draft due November 30
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.

- Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
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Week 11: December 1: Framing Disease, Disease as Frame

Readings

- Charles E. Rosenberg and Janet Golden, eds., *Framing Disease: Studies in Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992). (A link to these readings can be found in the Week 11 module.)
 - Charles Rosenberg, "Framing Disease: Illness, Society and History," pp. xiii
 - Steven J. Petizman, "From Bright's Disease to End-Stage Renal Disease," pp. 3–19
 - Peter C. English, "Emergence of Rheumatic Fever in the Nineteenth Century," pp. 20–32
 - John Farley, "Parasites and the Germ Theory of Disease," pp. 33–49
 - Michael MacDonald, "The Medicalization of Suicide in England: Layman, Physicians, and Cultural Change, 1500–1870," pp. 85–103
 - Bert Hansen, "American Physicians' 'Discovery' of Homosexuals, 1880–1900," pp. 104–133
 - Robert A. Aronowitz, "From Myalgic Encephalitis to Yuppie Flu: A History of Chronic Fatigue Syndromes," pp. 155–184

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine
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Week 12: December 8: Historical and Cultural Narratives: Smallpox, HIV, and COVID-19

- Ryan Murphy, dir., *The Normal Heart*, produced by Scott Ferguson, HBO Films and Blumhouse Productions, 2014. (A link to this video can be found in the Week 12 module.)
- Royles, *To Make the Wounded Whole* (all)
- David S. Jones, "History in a Crisis - Lessons for Covid-19," *New England Journal of Medicine* 382, no. 18 (April 2020): 1681–1683. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.)
- Jim Downs, "The Epidemics America Got Wrong," *The Atlantic*, March 22, 2020. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.](#))
- Arundhati Roy, "The Pandemic is a Portal," *Financial Times*, April 3, 2020. ([A link to this reading can be found in the Week 12 module.](#))

Assignments

- Final Paper/Project due December 14

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers

Throughout each term students will complete five short papers. Each of these assignments should be 1–2 pages in length, in 12 pt. font, and double-spaced. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings.

Discussion Board Posts

Students will respond to nine virtual discussion board posts for each course. Discussion boards are led by your section professor, who will provide an analytical prompt related to course material and instructions for participation. These prompts will give you the opportunity to interact with your fellow students and share your interpretation of course themes.

Question-and-Answer Sessions

Throughout the semester the lead scholar of each course will lead five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1-2 paragraph evaluation within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&A sessions, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 1–2 page review of topics covered for each missed Q&A.

Final Paper/Project

For the final assignment of each term, you will choose to complete either a 15-page research paper or a research project. The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts, documentary editing and transcription, podcasts, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page paper narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a paper or project, papers and projects are broken down into smaller assignments, or scaffolded, throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows students time to incorporate instructor feedback into their assignment.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Paper/Project Proposal (2%):

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final paper or project. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information on and historical context for your topic (answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be very specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing), and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (What is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%):

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan to use in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Paper or Project Preview (5%):

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section leader. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiographical essays.

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.