American Epidemics

Fall 2024
Tuesday Thursday
2:00 – 3:20 pm
Instructor: Kim Adams

From colonial ailments to global pandemics, disease has shaped the United States. Beginning with the metaphor of "invisible bullets" that the Algonquin peoples of the Chesapeake Bay used to describe settler colonial diseases, the class will trace patterns of racial formation and national belonging through epidemics. Students will learn to approach illness as an object of humanistic inquiry, and examine intersectional questions of race, gender, colonial power, economic privilege and social status through medical history. We will find strategies for critiquing and comprehending the inequities and anxieties of the post-pandemic present through the history and literature of biological crisis in America.

Please note that this syllabus is a live document, subject to change in response to the class dynamic and the everchanging world in which we are living.

Readings
All course readings will be available digitally through the course website. Many of the course readings are also available in book form, and can be found in the bookstore and online. **You are required to read the texts before class each week and to have a copy of the text open and available to reference during our class discussion.**

Academic Accommodations
Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Filene Center for Academic Advising, Support & Accessibility Services to register for accommodations as early as possible in the semester. They can be reached at accessibility@wheatoncollege.edu, by phone at 508-286-8215, or through their website: wheatoncollege.edu/academics/academic-advising/accessibility-services/

Academic Integrity & Generative AI
College education is a credentialling exercise that shapes the society in which we live, and our lives within it. We will be using generative AI in this class, and thinking critically about it, rather than allowing the machines to do the thinking for us. Academic integrity is not really about cheating or breaking rules. Rather, it is a positive thing: the development of habits and character traits that allow us to thrive in our academic lives with integrity. Wheaton has an honor code. Follow it. If you have questions, ask. Do the right thing. It matters.

Content
In this course we will be reading and talking about challenging issues across the intersections of race, gender, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, and ethnicity. In the classroom we will approach these issues and each other with intellectual and emotional care and generosity.

Attendance
You are permitted two absences for the entire course. More than two absences will count against your final grade. If you must miss class due to illness or religious observance, please let me know *in advance*. True presence involves not only physically being there, but also a strong sense of attention being paid, an absence of electronic devices that disturb others, and a consistent attitude of respect toward your fellow learners. Silence your phone, turn off the alerts on your computer, pay attention to your classmates, and contribute to the discussion.

Assignments

In-Class Writing – **In-Class Each Tuesday**
At the beginning of each Tuesday class students will answer a short writing prompt related to the longer reading for the unit. These prompts will focus on close reading skills, asking the student to analyze specific passages in relation to the larger themes of the class. Writing assignments will be done in a shared GoogleDoc, visible to all students for the purposes of supporting class discussion, and graded on completion.

AI interrogations – **In-Class Each Thursday**
On Thursdays students will ask questions of ChatGBT or DALL-E based upon the week's readings, and share the responses at the beginning of class. You will be graded on the quality of your question, and its ability to provoke a response your classmates find interesting.

Individual Presentation – **Due September 12**
Students will choose a song that that speaks to the themes of the class. They will present a close reading of the song that connects it to one of the course readings. This assignment is in preparation for the extra credit Music and Medicine event on September 14.

Digital Archive Assignment - **Due October 18 at Midnight.**
Using the "Influenza Encyclopedia" as a model, students will work in groups to curate their own disease specific digital archives. These sites will combine materials from our class readings with outside research. Students will use WordPress to build their site, write a brief (500-800 word introduction) and captions (c. 50 words) for each image, audio clip, document, or other file they include. We will run an in-class workshop on WordPress to help build these projects.

Group Presentation – **Due November 12**
Students will work in groups to read, analyze, and present one version of the story of leprosy in Hawaii, based upon our class readings. See Week 11 for details.

Podcast Assignment – **Due December 12 at 5pm.**
For this assignment students will produce a short (3-5 minute) audio story about a particular, individual experience of an epidemic. You will have the option of conducting an oral history—interviewing someone who experienced one of the diseases covered on our syllabus—or pursuing archival research on a historical figure who appears in our course readings. You are welcome to focus on the same topic as your research paper for the podcast. We will run an in-class workshop on recording, audio editing, and writing for audio prior to the assignment.

Grading
Attendance and Participation – 20%
Podcast Assignment – 20%
Digital Archive Assignment – 20%
Individual Presentation – 15%
Group Presentation – 15%
In-Class Writing – 5%
AI Interrogations – 5%

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Introduction

August 27
Ada Limón, "A Good Story" In *The Hurting Kind*. Mineapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2022.

August 29
Carmen Maria Machado, "Inventory," In *Her Body and Other Parties*. Minneapolis: Greywolf Press, 2017. pp.33-43. Online at LitHub: https://lithub.com/inventory/

Week 2: Invisible Bullets
September 3
Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the Newfound Land of Virginia*. London, 1588. Read: "On the nature and manners of the people" pp.34-44

September 5
David S. Jones, "Virgin Soils Revisited," *William and Mary Quarterly* (October 2003), 703-742.

Week 3: Yellow Fever
September 10
Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, "A Narrative Of the proceedings of the Coloured People during the awful calamity in Philadelphia, in the year 1793" in *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*. Philadelphia: Lee and Yeocum, 1888. pp. 33-51.

September 12
Rana Hogarth, "The Myth of Innate Racial Differences Between White and Black People's Bodies: Lessons From the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania." *American Journal of Public Health* (October 2019). pp.1339-1341.
Music Presentations Today

September 14
Extra Credit – Music and Medicine Event in Providence! Details soon.

Week 4: Small Pox
September 17
Margot Minardi, "The Boston Inoculation Controversy of 1721-1722: An Incident in the History of Race." *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 61, no. 1 (January 2004) pp. 47-76.

September 19
Cotton Mather, *Wholesome Words: A Visit of Advice, Given Unto Families that are Visited with Sickness; by a Pastoral Letter, Briefly Declaring the Duties Incumbent on All Persons in the Families, that Have Any Sick Persons in Them*. Boston: D. Henchman, 1713. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N01375.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext

Week 5: Cholera
September 24
Charles Rosenberg, "The Epidemic: 1832" In *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. pp. 13-39.

September 26
Edgar Allen Poe, "The Masque of the Red Death" *Graham's Magazine*. Vol 20, No 5 (May 1842) pp.257-259.

Week 6: Equine Influenza
October 1
Raymond Malewitz, "On the Origin of 'Oops!': The Language and Literature of Animal Disease." *Critical Inquiry*. Vol 45 (Summer 2019) pp. 839-858.

October 3
Dorothy Parker, "The Lady with the Lamp" *Harper's Bazaar* (April 1932) reprinted in *The Portable Dorothy Parker*. New York: Penguin, 1973. pp 246-253.

Week 7: Influenza of 1918

October 8: **Wordpress Workshop 1**
Malcolm Gladwell, "The Deadliest Virus Ever Known," *New Yorker,* 29 Sept 1997 https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/09/29/the-dead-zone

October 10: **Wordpress Workshop 2**
Michael Wilson, "What New York Looked Like During the 1918 Flu Pandemic," *New York Times,* 6 April 2020 https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/nyregion/spanish-flu-nyc-virus.html
Explore Online: "Influenza Encyclopedia: The American Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919." www.influenzaarchive.org

Week 8: Bubonic Plague
October 15: No Class. Go Outside.

October 17
Nayan Shah, "Plague and Managing the Commercial City." *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*. University of California Press, October 2001. p.120-157.

October 18 **Digital Archive Assignment Due at Midnight**

Week 9: Neurasthenia
October 22
Tom Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.

October 24
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper." *The New England Magazine* (January 1892): 647-656. https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/theliteratureofprescription/exhibitionAssets/digitalDocs/The-Yellow-Wall-Paper.pdf

Week 10: Typhoid
October 29
Priscilla Wald, "The Healthy Carrier." *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. Duke University Press, 2008. pp. 68-113.

October 31: Happy Halloween!
Listen: Radiolab, "Patient Zero" WNYC, Nov. 14, 2011.
https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/episodes/169879-patient-zero

Week 11: Leprosy
November 5: VOTE! Polio
David Oshinsky: "The Biggest Public Health Experiment Ever," *Polio: An American Story*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. pp. 188-213.

November 7
Mark O'Brien. "On Seeing A Sex Surrogate." *The Sun* (May 1990).
https://www.thesunmagazine.org/articles/23287-on-seeing-a-sex-surrogate

Week 12:
November 12
Class presentations today.
Read one of the following, based on your group assignment.
Piilani Kaluaikoolau, *The True Story of Kaluaikoolau as Told by His Wife, Piilani*. Translated by Frances N. Frazier. Kauai Historical Society, 2001. pp. 3-40.
Michelle Moran, "Creating a Colonial Disease." *Colonizing Leprosy: Imperialism and the Politics of Public Health in the United States*. University of North Carolina Press, 2012. pp.47-73.
Jack London, "Koolau the Leper." *The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii*. New York, The MacMillan Company, 1912.

November 14: **Podcast Workshop**
Guest Lecture from Patrick Johnson
No reading!

Week 13: HIV/AIDS
November 19
Sarah Schulman, "The Gentrification of AIDS" from *The Gentrification of the Mind*. University of California Press, 2012.

November 21
John McIntyre, "In Time of Plague." *Poetry Foundation* (26 Nov 2014).
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/70183/in-time-of-plague

ÍWeek 14: HIV/AIDS
November 26
Listen: Choose one episode from the NPR podcast "Blindspot: The Plague in the Shadows"
https://www.npr.org/podcasts/996597689/blindspot

Explore: Keith Haring Drawings from 1988, 1989, 1990
http://www.haring.com/!/year/1988
ACT-UP archive -- https://actupny.org/

November 28: No Class! Happy Thanksgiving!

Week 15: Covid 19
December 3 – **Podcast Workshop Day**
Bring a podcast about Covid-19 to share with the class.

December 5 – **Podcast Workshop Day**
Present your podcast in-progress.