

History 529/629 – Plagues and Pandemics

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Office Hours (on-line or zoom preferred): Tues, 2:00-4:00, Wed. 11:00- 2:00 and by appt.

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Course Description:

This is a history of disease, especially epidemic disease, in western and world history. It is not a survey, that is we will not give even coverage to disease from ancient times to the present. Instead we will spend roughly eight weeks looking at disease from ancient times to the last half of the 19th century, and about eight weeks on the period from about 1890 to the present. During the first eight weeks, we will read/discuss ways of thinking about disease and illness both in the abstract and in the ancient and medieval worlds. The purpose of this unit will be to provide a framework for understanding the dominant ways people in the West thought about disease and how echoes of these beliefs can still be heard. From there we will look at disease environment of the Roman empire to see the impact of disease on life in a large, prosperous, thoroughly interconnected empire. Next, we use the Black Death as a case study how traditional ideas about disease shaped the response to the plague as we examine how societies coped with the crisis that killed perhaps one of every three people. We will then look at disease during the beginnings of the age of colonization when disease pools from the Americas and Eurasia intermingled. The last unit of this section will begin to consider the tremendous changes in the human and disease environment brought about by urbanization and industrialization as well as the scientific revolutions that transformed our understanding of disease.

Much of the second section of the course will focus on the expansion of global networks and rise of scientific medicine. We begin with the Spanish flu. It was the first serious pandemic of the modern age and remains the most deadly by far. In roughly eighteen months about 40% of the world's 1.8 billion people caught the flu and between 80 to 100 million of them died. We will examine ideas about where and how the flu began, trace how it spread globally and at the local level, examine why it was so deadly, and study what public health officials did to mitigate what they could not cure. The final units will compare some of the great medical successes since World War Two (especially Typhus, Polio, and smallpox) and examine the emerging epidemics and potential epidemics such as AIDS, Avian flu, Ebola, Zika and, of course, COVID 19. This portion of the class will stress the tremendous expansion of human population and the system of thick global networks that have fundamentally altered the disease environment over the past 150 years.

Academic Objectives:

This class should help you develop the following competencies and skills:

- 1. A basic factual knowledge of the relationship between people and disease over time.**
- 2. Enhanced primary and secondary research abilities.**
- 3. Enhanced ability to analyze historical data, reach informed conclusions, and present your ideas and conclusions in a clear concise way.**

Required Book:

J. N. Hayes, *The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Response in Human History* ISBN 9780813546131

In addition to the text there will be a fair number required readings and other materials located inside the unit folders.

Grades and assignments:

Undergraduate Students:

4 to 7 discussions @ 20 pts. each
3 unit summaries @ 50 pts. each
2 exams @ 100 pts. each
Research/analytical assignments @ roughly
60 pts. Total
Research paper 100 pts

Graduate Students:

4 to 7 discussions @ 20 pts. each
7 unit summaries @ 50 pts. each
1 final exam @ 100 pts.
Research/analytical assignments @ roughly
100 pts. Total
Research paper 100 pts

Discussions: 20 points each. We will have between 4 and 7 on-line discussions, not including the “introductions” thread. The total number will depend on the effectiveness of some of the other assignments. In general you will be asked to contribute at least three but no more than six substantive posts. More detailed instructions will be included within each discussion.

Summary/analysis of unit materials: (graduate students do any 7 of 8, undergrads do any 3 of 8). 50 points each. You should aim for a balance of between 65 to 70% summary and 30 to 35% analysis/evaluation. Your summary should cover all the readings and related materials, such as videos. Your analysis should consider how the readings relate to each other, critique how effectively the authors make their case or leave questions unanswered, and include any stray observations you might have. The two main aims of this assignment are to help you see how the readings fit together into a coherent whole and to give you more experience at concise and precise summary and analysis of complex topics. You can approach your summary anyway you wish but I recommend you begin with a statement of the general themes of the unit as a whole and then in the body of your paper you look for ways to group the readings and related materials around those themes. Your summary should be between 650 to 1,100 words each.

Essay exams: Undergraduates do the midterm and final, graduate students do the final exam. 100 points each. Exams deal with the larger themes of the class. Three questions will be posted 3 days before they are due you must answer one. Due dates can be found in the tentative course schedule below. Your answer should be between 8000-1200 words.

Research and analytical assignments: points will vary with the assignment. For example, in the Unit 1 folder you will find an assignment requiring you to submit three scholarly reviews of Hayes, *The Burdens of Disease*. In the last unit you will find an assignment requiring you to evaluate those reviews based on your reading of the text. In between you will find assignments requiring you to locate and analyze newspaper articles related to a late 19th century Cholera outbreak and another asking you to research popular attitudes toward DDT before Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Some of these assignments might be specific to your research paper topic. The exact number of assignments will depend on how the class unfolds but you can expect about 100 points worth in total

Research paper: See the “Research Paper” link on Bb site for details

Grading scale (as a percentage):

A= 100-93.00	B+ = 89.99-87.0	C+ =79.99-77.0	D+ +69.99-67.0	59.99 or below =E.
A- = 92.99-90.0	B = 86.99-83.0	C = 76.99-73.0	D = 66.99-60.0	
	B- = 82.99-80	C- = 72.99-70		

You should have success in this class in general proportion to the effort you expend. If this does not happen be sure to contact me at the earliest opportunity.

Course Policies: Please see “University Policies” link on our Bb page for useful information on a variety of university policies and procedures.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit 1- January 18th - Sunday, January 30th: Introductions, ways of thinking about disease, disease and medicine in the Ancient world. Case study – plague in Athens, endemic and epidemic disease in the Roman empire

Unit 2 – January 30th - Sunday, February 13th: Medieval conceptions of disease; the Black Death - causes, attempted cures, creation of public health infrastructure, social impacts.

Unit 3 – February 13th - Sunday, February 27th: Disease and empire, the Columbian exchange; New attitudes - disease & medicine during the Enlightenment, case study of smallpox

Unit 4 – February 27th - Sunday, March 13th: Urbanization, Industrialization and disease. The Rise of the Public Health movement (science and sanitation). Case studies of Cholera and Tuberculosis.

Unit 5 – March 20th - April 3rd The Spanish flu, 1918-1922.

Unit 6 – April 3rd - Sunday, April 17th: Disease and Public Health from World War Two through 1980. The apparent end of epidemics (smallpox, polio, typhus)

Unit 7 – April 17th - Sunday May 1st: Pandemics in an age of globalization and scientific medicine. New threats –AIDS, Ebola, COVID- and the persistence of old enemies (TB and Malaria)

Unit 8 – May 1st - THURSDAY, MAY 12th; Conclusions and Speculation

Major assignment due dates:

Midterm due end of day on Friday, March 11th (undergraduates only)

Research paper due end of day on Monday, April 25th

Final exam due end of day on Tuesday, May 17th