

Medical History 919	Professor Richard Keller
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MSC 1406	Office: MSC 1423
Wednesdays 1:15-3:15 pm	Office hours: Tuesday 10-11 am aba

Disaster and Catastrophe in the Modern World

This graduate seminar focuses on the historical and contemporary dimensions of disaster and catastrophe in the modern world. It explores the coupling of human and natural systems through a concentration on intersections between natural and human-made hazards and disasters. The course examines such "natural" disasters such as hurricanes, tsunamis, and heat waves, but also industrial catastrophes such as the Bhopal and Chernobyl explosions. The focus is principally on acute rather than chronic disasters and degradation.

The seminar provides an introduction to an expanding humanities and social science literature on risk, vulnerability, disaster, and catastrophe. While historians have begun to contribute to this field, anthropologists and sociologists have been its primary contributors. The course is thus organized by theme rather than chronology, toward the end of mining this literature for points of inquiry and methodological perspectives that might be most useful for historians. Principal themes include the intersections of nature and culture for shaping risk and the experience of disaster; the question of agency in natural and technological hazards and disasters; organizational responses to disaster; the history of disaster as environmental history and the history of the present; the effects of disaster and catastrophe on human experience, subjectivity, and citizenship; disasters as instrumental crises in the history of public health; the links between disaster and place; and the imagination of catastrophe.

Students are required to participate in an active and informed manner during weekly discussions, and will be required to lead at least one discussion during the semester. Written work consists of ten short responses (2 pp.) to weekly readings (due the morning of the discussion) as well as a longer original research paper (20-25 pp.) on a disaster-related topic.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, I urge any student with a disability to inform me as soon as possible, so that I may make any necessary accommodations to ensure full participation and facilitate educational accessibility. All such requests are confidential.

Students are expected to familiarize themselves with UW policies on plagiarism and to assume full responsibility for academic integrity in all coursework.

Books

Required books will be available at the UW bookstore.

xUlrich Beck, *Risk Society*

xSteven Biel, *Down with the Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic Disaster*

Douglas Brinkley, *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*

Lee Clarke, *Worst Cases: Terror and Catastrophe in the Popular Imagination*

Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*
 Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*
 Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster*
 Kai Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: The Human Experience of Modern Disasters*
 Kim Fortun, *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*
 Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago*
 Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents: Living with High Risk Technologies*
 Adriana Petryna, *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl*
 Richard A. Posner, *Catastrophe: Risk and Response*
 xTed Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*
 xDiane Vaughan, *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA*

Shorter reading selections, marked with an asterisk, will be available through electronic reserve.

Reading/meeting schedule

5 Sept.—Introduction

12 Sept.—Framing disaster: How do we think about catastrophe? What can historians contribute?

*John Burnham, "A Neglected Field: The History of Natural Disasters," *AHA Perspectives* (April 1988), 4 pp.

*Ken Hewitt, "The Idea of Calamity in a Technocratic Age," in *Interpretations of Calamity from the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, ed. by K. Hewitt (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1983), pp. 1-32

*Paul Susman, Phil O'Keefe, and Ben Wisner, "Global Disasters: A Radical Interpretation," in Hewitt 1983, pp. 263-83.

*Jenny Rudolph and Nelson Repenning, "Disaster Dynamics: Understanding the Role of Quantity in Organizational Collapse," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2002): 1-30.

19 Sept.—Making sense of disaster: Lisbon and *Titanic*

*Robert H. Brown, "The 'Demonic' Earthquake: Goethe's Myth of the Lisbon Earthquake and Fear of Modern Change," *German Studies Review* 15, no. 3 (1992): 475-91.

Biel, *Down with the Old Canoe*

26 Sept.—Disasters and historical agency

*Eric Jones, "Disasters and Capital Accumulation," in *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 22-41.

Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*

3 Oct.—Disaster history as history of the present

Steinberg, *Acts of God*
Davis, *Ecology of Fear*

PAPER TOPIC DUE IN CLASS

10 Oct.— Ecologies of risk and a science of vulnerability

Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble*

*Susan L. Cutter, "The vulnerability of science and the science of vulnerability," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 1 (2003): 1-12.

*Susan L. Cutter, Bryan J. Boruff, and W. Lynn Shirley, "Social vulnerability to environmental hazards," *Social Science Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (2003): 242-61.

17 Oct.—Disaster and place I: Chicago 1995

Klinenberg, *Heat Wave*

24 Oct.—Disaster and place II. The *canicule*: France 2003

Keller presentation
Reading TBA

31 Oct.—Disaster and place III. Katrina, part 1: The hurricane and its management

Brinkley, *The Great Deluge*
Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water*

7 Nov.—Katrina, part 2: Changing the field

*David Glenn, "Lost (and Found) in the Flood," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (7 October 2005).

*Susan L. Cutter and Christopher T. Emrich, "Moral Hazard, Social Catastrophe: The Changing Face of Vulnerability along the Hurricane Coasts," *AAPSS* 604 (2006): 102-112.

*Special issue of *Social Studies of Science* 37 (2007): 93-158.

*Michael Lewis, "In Nature's Casino," *New York Times Magazine* (26 August 2007).

14 Nov.—Modernity, technology, and risk

Beck, *Risk Society*

*Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 129-70.

*Gabrielle Hecht, "Enacting Cultural Identity: Risk and Ritual in the French Nuclear Workplace," *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 4 (1997): 483-507.

FIRST DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE 5 PM, FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER

21 Nov.—“Normal” disasters?

Perrow, *Normal Accidents*, selections.

Vaughan, *The Challenger Launch Decision*, selections.

28 Nov.—Environmental justice and the globalization of risk: Bhopal

Fortun, *Advocacy after Bhopal*

5 Dec.— Disaster and citizenship: Chernobyl

Petryna, *Life Exposed*

12 Dec.—Paranoia or Preparedness? Disaster and the Contemporary Imagination

Clarke, *Worst Cases*

Posner, *Catastrophe*

FINAL DRAFT OF RESEARCH PAPER DUE 5 PM, FRIDAY 21 DECEMBER