

History of Science 280
Honors Seminar: Studies in Science, Technology and Medicine
Topic: Diseases in History – Cholera and Tuberculosis

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At first glance, disease appears to be a simple phenomenon. In many cases, an external agent (a microorganism, for example, or a poison) enters the body and causes the person to fall ill as the body attempts to resist the agent. In other cases, we also name “diseases” those ailments that do not arise from external sources, but instead from some internal cause. In both instances, the problem affects first and foremost the individual.

Yet a moment’s reflection rapidly suggests to us that diseases do far more than cause individuals to become ill. Epidemic outbreaks can massively disrupt social structure and people’s everyday lives. Just as importantly, the beliefs and habits of a given society, which in the broadest sense we call that society’s “culture,” can be indelibly marked by the kinds of diseases it experiences. Thus, for reasons of their profound influence on society and culture, diseases offer a marvelous vehicle for studying history. This semester, we will focus on the very different roles of two diseases, cholera and tuberculosis, in 19th-century European and American history.

Broadly speaking, this course has two basic aims. First, I hope our readings and discussions during the first few weeks will give you a good introduction to the history of medicine and public health during the 19th century. But this is merely the preparation for the second and major part of the course: the production of a 10–12 page paper in which you will: 1) define your own specific topic within the general subject of the seminar; 2) work with historical documents in the researching of the paper; 3) present an oral report of your work to the group; 4) write a complete draft of the paper for critique and revision; and 5) submit a final draft of the paper for a grade.

There are two required texts, which may be purchased at the University Book Store:

Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*

René and Jean Dubos, *The White Plague*

There is also a packet of readings, available for purchase at the History of Science office, 7143 Social Sciences. Finally, there is one recommended text, which will give you a nice picture of the background to our specific themes:

W. F. Bynum, *Science and the Practice of Medicine in the Nineteenth Century*

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Class Meetings and Readings

It will not have escaped your notice that this course meets only once a week, giving us a maximum of 15 meetings. Unlike other courses (and other courses I teach), where missing a few lectures or the occasional discussion section has no serious consequences, missing class meetings in 280 will cause you to fall behind, and it will hurt your grade for the class participation portion

of the course. *Therefore you will be expected to come to every meeting. Period. Exams, major papers for other courses, and the other things that come up during the semester will not count as acceptable reasons for missing class. The only acceptable excused absences that I can foresee are religious observances and illnesses.*

Again because we meet only once a week, each meeting during the first half of the semester will have what looks like a pretty heavy load of reading. I apologize for this, and I know it will prove burdensome especially for incoming freshmen who are not used to such workloads. But please understand that we have only a few short weeks to give you enough knowledge to begin working on your research papers. In compensation for the number of pages, I think you will find the readings both accessible and interesting.

So, you may be asking, how does one get through as much as 200 pages of reading? Well, the first thing to do is to allow enough time for it. Don't start two hours before class. Second and more importantly, don't try to read and digest every single word. If they are good writers, authors frequently give you signals about what they intend to do in a particular piece of writing. They may briefly describe the topics to be covered in the introduction, for example, or the conclusion may contain a summary of the argument. Pay closest attention to these parts of the reading, because they will give you a sense of what the whole thing is about. Knowing what the structure of a writing is and keeping it in mind as you go along often allows you to read faster. Finally, don't be afraid to skip or just glance at certain portions of a reading, if you clearly understand what the author is doing in that section. But whatever you do, please make every attempt to look at the entire reading.

2. Writing Assignments

Your written work for the course will consist of: 1) the previously mentioned research paper, 10–12 pages in length; 2) a shorter 5-page essay, in which you will compare how two different historians use evidence in telling their stories; and 3) several brief 1–2 page informal writings which will serve to direct your attention to particular aspects of a given week's readings. **PLEASE NOTE:** the research paper and the 5-page essay require that you produce a draft, which will be read and critiqued by Jason Crabb, our writing fellow, in consultation with me. The draft must be written as a finished paper – that means it must be typewritten, polished with respect to prose and spelling, contain appropriate references to readings, and so forth. After you have submitted the drafts and Jason has had a chance to read and comment on them, you will arrange a meeting with him (and, if desired, with me) to discuss the paper. You will then re-write the paper, taking the criticisms in hand, and submit it for a grade. **Submission of the drafts is an essential component of this course, and failure to turn in a draft will result in lowering your final grade by 1.5 points.** Therefore a 4.0 paper will receive a 2.5, and so on.

Why do we place such emphasis on production of the drafts and rewriting? Experienced writers know that good writing necessarily involves rewriting, not just to correct spelling errors and typographical mistakes, but to re-think what the paper is trying to do and how it accomplishes its goals. The students who participate in the writings fellows program are themselves excellent writers and have undergone training to give them the skills to be effective critics of writing. Writing fellows allow you to receive informed feedback on your writing from students like yourself, and you will find this feedback extremely useful. So please make good use of it.

3. Grading

Your final grade will be weighted as follows:

25% class participation

20% 5-page essay

55% research paper

“Class participation” is defined as including attendance at our weekly meetings, timely and regular submission of the informal writing assignments, and finally, willingness to participate in weekly discussions. By making your grade rest in part on participation in discussions, it is not my intention to penalize students who may be shy or who may otherwise lack the confidence to talk a lot in class. I do not expect everyone to talk the same amount, but I do expect everyone to be able to answer questions when asked and do his or her best to support the discussion.

Schedule of Weekly Meetings and Readings

Sept. 8 - Introduction: What is the history of disease?

Sept. 15 - Introduction to tuberculosis in the 19th century.

Reading: Dubos and Dubos, *The White Plague*, all.

Sept. 22 - Cholera in the 19th century

Reading: Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*, all.

Sept. 29 - Cholera as a matter of public health

Reading: Eyler, “William Farr and the Cholera” (packet)

Evans, *Death in Hamburg*, pp. 226–284. (packet)

Oct. 6. - Tuberculosis as a cultural and social phenomenon

Reading: Barnes, *The Making of a Social Disease*, pp. 23–73 (packet)

Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death*, pp. 13–56, 179–225.

Distribution of 5-page essay assignment

Oct. 13 - Germ Theory & Lab Science

Reading: Rosenkrantz, “The Trouble with Bovine Tuberculosis” (packet)

Hand in draft of 5-page essay

Oct. 20 - How to work with primary sources

Reading: To be distributed at the Oct. 13 meeting.

Oct. 27 - Library session (Meet in Middleton Health Sciences Library on the 3rd floor)

(2nd hour: Brainstorming on possible paper topics)

Hand in final version of 5-page essay

Nov. 3 - Presentation/discussion of paper proposals

Distribution of readings by students for next week

Nov. 10 - Discussion of student-generated readings

Nov. 17 - Progress reports on research papers and troubleshooting session

Nov. 24 - No formal meeting (Thanksgiving): individual conferences to discuss papers

Drafts of research papers due Monday, November 29

Dec. 1 - Oral presentations of research papers

Dec. 8 - More oral presentations of research papers

Dec. 15 - Still more oral presentations of research papers

Deadline for submission of research papers: Tuesday, December 21