

Comparing Pandemics
Fall 2021
Wednesdays, 2-4pm
HIST 72600
Room 6114

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines epidemic diseases and their social consequences across historical time and geographic space. We will focus primarily on the Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century, smallpox and its role in the conquest of the Americas, the “Spanish” flu pandemic of 1918-1919, and the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-2021(?). We will seek to understand how different societies were affected by these plagues, how they responded to them, and the consequences of these public health and social crises for the societies in question.

LEARNING GOALS

Upon completion of the course, students should have a good familiarity with the major epidemics that human societies have faced over the past 700 or so years and how we have responded to them.

EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

Classes will consist primarily of discussion of the readings. Discussions should address the following kinds of questions:

- What is the author’s argument?
- What kinds of evidence does the author offer in support of his or her claims?
- What methodological issues does the argument raise?
- How does this selection relate to other things we have read previously in the class?

Students will be expected to write **three (3)** brief “reaction papers” of **1-2 double-spaced pages** (not more – brevity is the soul of wit!). Each of the reaction papers should address one of the weekly reading selections and should be submitted in advance of the week’s meeting when we discuss that selection. Together they will account for **20%** of the total grade. Students will also be expected to present two or more of the weekly reading selections (depending on how many author presentations we end up having). **Presentations** will count for **30%** of the class grade. Presentations **should not simply review the reading material**, but should summarize it briefly and identify questions and criticisms with the aim of **generating discussion**. The remaining **50%** of the grade for the class will be based on a **final paper** of **15-20 double-spaced**, typed pages (using standard one-inch margins and a 12-point font), the focus of which you should discuss with me either via e-mail or in person and then outline in a **one-paragraph, single-spaced abstract** that must be **submitted** to me **in Word via e-mail** by **Tuesday, April 20**. The aim of the papers will be to demonstrate your understanding of some aspect of the material covered in the course. Final papers are to be submitted to me **in Word via e-mail** (so that I can “Track Changes” and “Add Comments”) by **Wednesday, December 15, at 4pm**.

A Note on Citations and References

When you are writing papers, you should select one style for citations or references and use it consistently. Perhaps the simplest, if not necessarily the most elegant, is to use in-text references of the form “(Tocqueville 1955: 75),” with a list of “Works Cited” at the end of the paper.

CLASS SCHEDULE

August 25: Introduction to the class

September 1: Frank **Snowden**, *Epidemics and Society*, part I (prefaces, Chs. 1-11)

September 8: **NO CLASS**; see **Nanfu Wang**, “In the Same Breath,” HBO documentary (2021)

September 15: **NO CLASS**

September 22: Frank **Snowden**, *Epidemics and Society*, part II (Chs. 13-22)

September 29: Massimo **Livi-Bacci**, *Conquest: The Destruction of the American Indians*

October 6: Robert **Fogel**, *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100*

October 13: Nancy **Tomes**, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*

October 20: Alfred **Crosby**, *America’s Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*

October 27: Laura **Spinney**, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 & How it Changed the World*

November 3: J. R. **McNeill** and Peter **Engelke**, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene Since 1945*

November 10: Andrew **Lakoff**, *Unprepared: Global Health in a Time of Emergency*

November 17: Nicholas **Christakis**, *Apollo’s Arrow: The Profound and Enduring Impact of the Coronavirus on the Way We Live*

November 24: Steven **Johnson**, *Extra Life: A Short History of Living Longer*

December 1: Adam **Kucharski**, *The Rules of Contagion: Why Things Spread—and Why They Stop*

December 8: Robert D. **Putnam**, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*

****December 15: Final papers due****

Books we will be reading:

Snowden, Frank, *Epidemics and Society*, parts I and II

Livi-Bacci, Massimo, *Conquest: The Destruction of the American Indians*

Fogel, Robert, *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100*

Tomes, Nancy, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*

Crosby, Alfred, *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*

Spinney, Laura, *Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World*

McNeill, J. R., and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene Since 1945*

Lakoff, Andrew, *Unprepared: Global Health in a Time of Emergency*

Christakis, Nicholas, *Apollo's Arrow: The Profound and Enduring Impact of the Coronavirus On the Way We Live*

Johnson, Steven, *Extra Life: A Short History of Living Longer*

Kucharski, Adam, *The Rules of Contagion: Why Things Spread – and Why They Stop*

Nanfu Wang, “In the Same Breath,” HBO documentary (2021)

Putnam, Robert D., *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*