

Epidemics, Medicine, and Society

Course Instructor: Gideon Manning, PhD

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Course Description

The last year and a half has taught us all that epidemics do not just belong to the past. This course aims to help us appreciate how medicine and society change when illness, uncertainty, and death are experienced on a massive scale. We will specifically discuss how past societies have responded to epidemics and the ensuing changes in ideas about health and daily life, the role of healers and religion in healthcare, the expansion of hospitals as sites of care, the rise of government powers of regulation, the impact on art, literature, and economics, and the evolution of medical theory and practice. Each class meeting will also provide an opportunity to reflect on our own experiences and the ways in which the current pandemic has changed us too.

Learning Outcomes

1. Understand epidemics as historical events and the ways people have responded
2. Appreciate the common features between past epidemics and the epidemics of today
3. Apply the lessons of the past to understand our current moment and the likely future of epidemics

Recommended Background:

D. Jones, "History in Crisis: Lessons for COVID-19" *New England Journal of Medicine* 382/18 (April 2020): 1681-83

P. Slack, *Plague: A Very Short Introduction* (ISBN – a short and readable introduction to our topic)

Course Topics and Schedule (subject to revision)

Week 1: Plague Begins—1346

Readings: Selections from J. Aberth, *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-50* and D. Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West*

Week 2: Life with Plague

Readings: Selections from J. Hatcher, *The Black Death*; R. Horrox, *The Black Death*; and S. K. Cohn, "After the Black Death: Labour Legislation and Attitudes towards Labour in Late Medieval Western Europe"

Week 3: Diagnosing and Fighting Plague

Readings: Selections from J. Aberth, *The Black Death*; S. K. Cohn, "The Black Death and the Burning of the Jews"; and L. Smoller, "Of Earthquakes, Hail, Frogs, and Geography"

Week 4: Plague and Collective Action

Readings: Selections from A. Cook and N. D. Cook, *The Plague Files*; K. W. Bowers, "Balancing Individual and Communal Needs: Plague and Public Health in Early Modern Seville"; and P. Slack, "Responses to Plague in Early Modern Europe: The Implications of Public Health"

Week 5: Plague's Inevitable Return

Readings: Selections from D. Defoe, *Journal of a Plague Year*; London's Bills of Mortality; and K. L. S. Newman, "Shutt Up: Bubonic Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern England"

Week 6: Epidemics yesterday, today, and tomorrow

Readings: M. Ziegler, "The Black Death and the Future of Plague" and P. Findlen, "What Would Boccaccio Say About Covid-19"