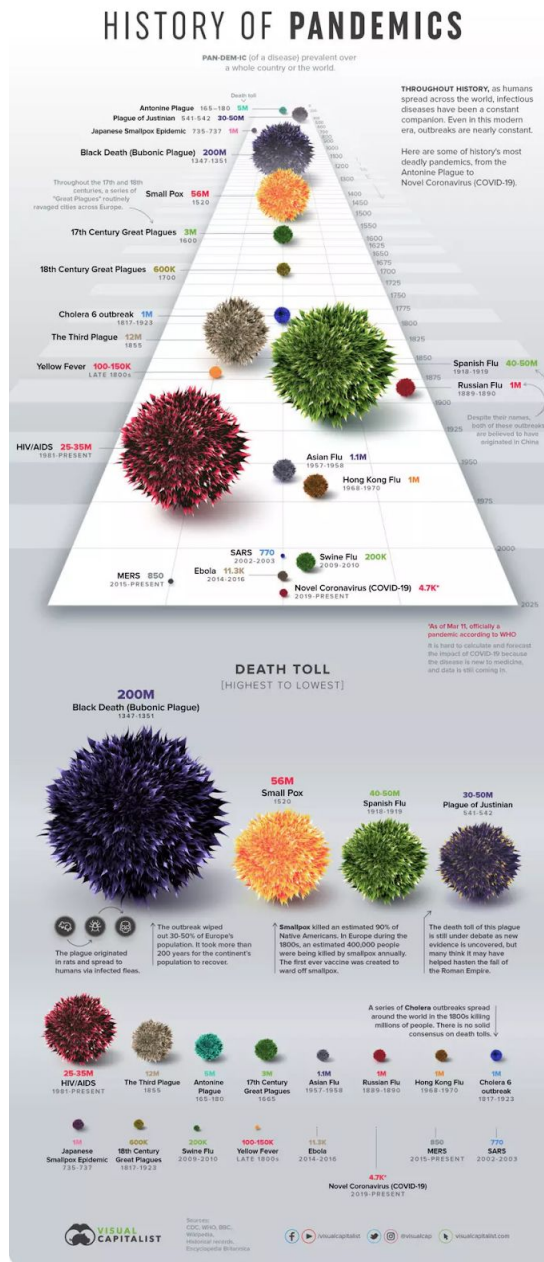


21H.000 The History of Now: Plagues and Pandemics



Fridays, 2-3pm, See Canvas for course materials and zoom/webinar links.

Instructors: Sana Aiyar, Associate Professor of History, MIT
Dwai Banerjee, Associate Professor of Science, Technology, and Society, MIT
Kate Brown, Professor of Science, Technology, and Society, MIT
Malick Ghachem, Associate Professor of History, MIT
Elizabeth Wood, Professor of History, MIT

This course looks at the impact of plagues and pandemics on human and non-human history and interactions from an interdisciplinary and global perspective. Students will be exposed to a range of issues relating to the historical and contemporary understanding of pandemics, plagues, and their long afterlives. Themes will include defining “pandemics,” looking at the intersection of race, immigration, policing, and public health, and the environment. The class will meet virtually and is organized as a webinar with guest speakers throughout the semester. This subject can count toward the 9-unit discovery-focused credit limit for first-year students.

Requirements: Attendance is mandatory for all the 9 scheduled webinars and students are expected to submit questions for the panelists through the chat function. Students are required to submit on canvas brief written comments on the presentations by midnight on the Friday of the webinar. Students are required to attend two additional classes for discussion with the instructors on **10/16** and **11/6**.

Optional, recommended readings will be available on Canvas. Students are strongly encouraged to review these before the webinar.

This class is Pass/Fail.

Class Schedule

Week I

4 September **Introductory Class**

Week II

11 September **What is a Pandemic?**

Speakers:

Kavita Sivaramakrishnan, Associate Professor, Mailman School of Public Health and History, Columbia University

Sylvia Hood Washington, environmental epidemiologist, historian, author, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954*

Moderators: Kate Brown and Dwai Banerjee

Readings:

Earthbeat interview with Sylvia Hood Washington:

<https://www.ncronline.org/file/earthbeat-interview-dr-sylvia-hood-washington>

Charles Rosenberg, What is an Epidemic (Reading in Canvas)

Week III

18 September **Race and Pandemics**

Speakers:

Adia Benton, Associate Professor, Anthropology, Northwestern University

Kathryn Olivarius, Assistant Professor, History, Stanford University

Moderators: Sana Aiyar and Dwai Banerjee

Readings:

Kathryn Olivarius, “The Dangerous History of Immunoprivilege”, *New York Times*, 12 April 2020

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/opinion/coronavirus-immunity-passports.html>

<https://medium.com/variantbio/an-anthropologists-perspective-on-covid-19-q-a-with-dr-adia-benton-7095911c2c10>

Week IV

25 September **No Class**

Week V

2 October **Cities and Plagues**

Speakers:

Cindy Ermus, Assistant Professor, History, University of Texas-san Antonio

Martin Melosi, Professor, History, University of Houston

Moderators: Malick Ghachem and Kate Brown

Readings:

Sasha von Oldershausen, “Is it Time for Americans to Embrace the Bidet?,” *New York Times*, 1 April 2020

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/01/style/toilet-paper-shortage-bidet-coronavirus-wipes.html?login=email&auth=login-email>

Cindy Ermus, “The Danger of Prioritizing Politics and Economics during the Coronavirus Outbreak,” *Washington Post*, 13 March 2020. [PDF attachment, article is behind paywall]

Week VI

9 October **Immigration and Contagion**

Speakers:

Nayan Shah, Professor, American Studies and Ethnicity, and History, University of Southern California

Natalia Molina, Professor, American Studies and Ethnicity, University of Southern California

Moderator: Sana Aiyar

Readings:

<https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5650>

<https://www.lataco.com/mexican-disease-plague-pandemic/>

Week VII

16 October **Class meeting with instructors**

Week VIII

23 October **Demography and Biopower**

Speakers:

John Brown, Professor, Economics, Clark University

Anne McCants, Professor, History, MIT

Moderator: Elizabeth Wood

Readings:

Hamlin, Christopher. "'CHOLERA FORCING' The Myth of the Good Epidemic and the Coming of Good Water." *American Journal of Public Health* 99, no. 11 (November 2009): 1946–54.

<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2009.165688>.

McCants, Anne. "How History Can Help Us Solve Global Economic Issues." MIT News, April 22, 2016.

<http://news.mit.edu/2016/solving-political-cultural-economic-dimensions-global-issues-anne-mccants-0422>.

Week IX

30 October **Public Health, Biopower, and Inequality**

Speakers:

Carlo Caduff, Reader, Global Health and Science Medicine, Kings College, London

Amy Moran-Thomas, Anthropology, MIT

Moderator: Dwai Banerjee

Readings:

<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/maq.12599>

Week X

6 November **Class meeting with instructors**

Week XI

13 November **Plants and Plagues**

Speakers:

Jeane Beagle Ristaino, Professor, Plant and Microbial Biology, North Carolina State University

John McNeill, Professor, History, Georgetown University

Tristan Brown, Assistant Professor, History, MIT

Moderator: Kate Brown

Readings:

Week XII

20 November **Sovereignities, Plagues, and Policing**

Speakers:

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

Mary Augusta Brazelton, University Lecturer, History and Philosophy of Science, Cambridge University

Moderators: Dwai Banerjee and Sana Aiyar

Readings:

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2020/mar/31/lessons-from-the-1918-spanish-flu-pandemic-podcast>

<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/opinion-articles/articles/epidemic-control-in-chinese-public-health-past-and-present>

Week XIII

27 November **No Class**

Week XIV

4 December **Premodern Pandemics**

Speakers:

Nükhet Varlik, Associate Professor, History, University of South Carolina

Michael McCormick, Professor, History, Harvard University (tentative)

***Moderator:* Malick Ghachem**

Readings:

https://www.sc.edu/uofsc/posts/2020/03/covid_impact_nukhet_varlik.php