HILD 30: The History of Public Health

Spring 2013

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Course description

Public health concerns and campaigns have always been bound up with the global activities of trade, exploration, war, missionary work, and colonization. This class will examine a series of episodes in the global history of public health, from the invention of vaccines and the first sanitation campaigns, to the diseases of affluence, and beyond. By investigating the political, cultural and economic dimensions of such initiatives, we will attempt to use the lessons of history to pose urgent questions about how public health policies and initiatives work or fail to work across the globe. As we proceed chronologically through the history of public health, each week will focus on a different aspect of public health intervention, examining debates such as the relative importance of social versus biological factors in epidemic disease, the politics of sanitation campaigns, the legacies of colonialism, the definition of progress, and the rights and wrongs of ‘soft’ power.

Requirements

The class will meet MWF. Attendance is mandatory. There is no textbook for the class, and all readings will be available electronically on TED. Students must complete the assigned readings according to the schedule below, and must come to Friday’s class each week prepared to participate in discussion of that week’s readings, in response to specific questions that will be posed in Wednesday’s lecture. I will be calling on students at random, so come prepared to participate.

There will be two take-home midterm examinations, the first consisting of a short essay (approximately five to eight pages), due on the Friday of fifth week, the second consisting of a research project, due on the Friday of tenth week.
Schedule of readings and topics

FIRST WEEK: What is public health? What is global health? Why history?


‘Gapminder’ website

SECOND WEEK: When and why did the gap begin to open?


THIRD WEEK: The origins of public health and epidemiology


FOURTH WEEK: Hygienic modernity and colonial medicine


FIFTH WEEK: Universalism and world health

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

SIXTH WEEK: From decolonization to Alma Ata


The Declaration of Alma Ata

SEVENTH WEEK: Neoliberal public health


EIGHTH WEEK: Colonial legacies?


Olga Shevchenko and Renée Fox (2008) ““nationals” and “expatriates”: Challenges of fulfilling “sans frontières” (“without borders”) ideals in international humanitarian action’ *Health and Human Rights* vol. 10 #1

NINTH WEEK: The War on Terror and other Contemporary Issues in Global Health


Kelly Brownell and Kenneth Warner (2009) "The Perils of Ignoring History: Big Tobacco Played Dirty and Millions Died. How Similar is Big Food?" *Millbank Quarterly* vol 87, #1, 259-294