

Anthropology 2290G-650: Plagues and Peoples

Distance Studies

Course Outline

Winter 2017



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Class Time: ONLINE ONLY

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Course Description:

Just for a moment, think about what the word “plague” means to you. It’s a word that has many *historic* connotations: the bubonic plague; Plague of Justinian; pneumonic plague; plague ships; plague pits, plague doctors etc. My point, if you can bear with me for a second, is that if you mention the word “plague” the first thing many people think of is something along the lines of a wide spread, extremely contagious disease that took many lives. As well, you might confine it to the tattered edges of a distant history—it’s something that took place *a long time ago*. But here’s a thought: do plagues still exist? Well, in short the answer is yes and no. Yes, bubonic plague still exists here and there throughout both the developed and developing worlds. And, no, its incidence and prevalence rates aren’t quite what they were 400-500 years ago. But what about other, more contemporary diseases that have the similar wide spread effects the Black Death

had in the 14th century as it swept across Europe? Many academics, including medical anthropologist and physician, Paul Farmer, would argue that HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, are the “modern plagues” that are ravaging impoverished Third World countries like Haiti, marked as they are by poverty, political upheaval, and sometimes natural disasters. Now, tacking back and forth between historical and contemporary understandings of plague, there are some interesting similarities and distinctions between the interpretation, reaction to, and approach to the seemingly indiscriminant reach of these afflictions—and this is precisely the point of our course: to take a comparative temporal and cross-cultural approach to understanding how the social and biological dynamics of plague affects people. As such, we’ll be looking at a subjective narrative account of plague in an historic urban context, specifically the Great Plague of London in 1664/66. As a comparative counterpoint, we’ll be reading about the dynamics of modern plagues of Third World contexts, such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. For each temporal context, then, we’ll gain insight into how plagues are interpreted, acted upon and managed; as well as how their noxious effects and distributions—regardless of distinctive gendered, social, cultural, economic and political moorings to history and geographic region—always fall along fractured fault-lines of inequality and disadvantage.

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand the historically-contingent social, cultural, political and economic influences on the interpretation, treatment and management of bubonic plague
- Gain insight into the shifting bases of population disease dynamics, and appreciate how HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis have become the modern plagues of impoverished, politically instable countries, like Haiti
- Identify the relationship between broad level social forces and their influence on individual biography and the lived experience of disease and suffering
- Recognize that ethnographic fieldwork can reveal the limitations of standard epidemiological categories, such as “accepted risk factors”

Required Texts:

Daniel Defoe. 2001. *A Journal of the Plague Year*. New York: Dover Publications.

Paul Farmer. 2001. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

***Readings marked with asterisks will be available for download on the OWL course website

Evaluation:

Discussion Board Participation: 35%

Since this is not a classroom-based course, all students will need to participate through regular posts on the discussion board. You will be required to make **two substantive contributions each week**. Weekly contributions—totaling at least one full paragraph per contribution—will include the following:

1) You must make an *original post*—this will be a question or a comment/reflection on or reaction to the readings. I'm open with respect to content, so if you want to comment on a portion of the readings you find interesting, puzzling or emotionally difficult that is perfectly acceptable. Or, if you want to connect the readings to features you have found in the media (television, the Internet), personal experience or other classes, then that's perfectly fine as well.

2) You will need to *respond thoughtfully and respectfully to a fellow student's original post* in the form of a question, comment, reflection or reaction. In some cases, you may not agree with what a fellow student has written, and that is fine; however, in cases of disagreement, I expect each and every one of you to make a logical argument based on sound reasoning—and not an argument based on one's emotions, prejudices or fears. This is called an *ad hominem* argument, and won't be accepted in the discussion board context of this class. Please remember, this is *not* the CBC's news story comment section.

PLEASE NOTE: Discussion board participation will be graded with comments in OWL weekly, so that students may keep track of their academic progress throughout the course. **The final discussion board participation grade will be based on each student's best 11 out of 12 discussion board postings.** This means that should you end up **missing one week** of discussion board posts (two in total), your overall participation grade will *not* be affected. If, for some reason, you end up missing more than one week, please contact me directly.

Weekly quizzes: 10%

Beginning with **Week 2**, students will complete a timed multiple-choice quiz pertaining to that week's readings. Each quiz will be open online for one week. All quizzes will contain **five questions** each. In the event that you miss a quiz, please notify me or the TA as soon as possible so we can figure out a time for you to re-take it.

"Fieldnotes" analysis assignment: 20%

You will be an historical anthropologist for this assignment! You will be required to thoroughly read through the Defoe book, and treat it as if it were actual fieldnotes and journal entries written by a medical anthropologist. Now, Defoe wasn't an anthropologist at all; he was actually a journalist, writer and a spy! So, *A Journal of the Plague Year* is not comprised of actual anthropological fieldnotes at all, but we can pretend it is. In actuality, Defoe's book is based on "fieldwork" (loosely construed) he conducted with family members, neighbours and other city-folk in London, England,

almost *60 years after* the Great Plague of London, England (1664-1666). Defoe's first-hand accounts, detailed parish records of deaths, thick descriptions of neighbourhoods etc., are also interspersed with fictional reconstructions of the everyday experience of plague in London.

Your task, along with your regular postings and comments made on the discussion board about Defoe's book, will be to write a brief fieldnote report (no longer than 7 pages) based on your assessment of the worldview that arises from Defoe's "fieldnotes" about the aforementioned Great Plague of London. I'd like you to pay very close attention to the following—noting the *interconnection* between them all, and their effect on the interpretation, treatment, and management of plague:

1) Social explanatory models:

-According to Defoe, what caused the plague? What were its symptoms? What were the meanings attributed to the disease? And how and why did it spread so quickly? How or what was responsible? What were the local approaches to treatment/containment?

2) Moral texture:

-When it comes to the search for meaning, disease—in many cases—is not interpreted and explained outside of a moral vacuum. Since this was the 17th Century, there were certain, let's call them "moral inflections" attributed or imputed to many afflictions, whether they were caused by natural disaster or social/religious transgressions. In the context of the plague in London, what were they? How did Defoe write about them? What were his moral leanings when it came to attributing meaning to the plague—does he agree with his neighbours and local city-folk? Why or why not? Did nationalism play any role? Were other nations to blame?

3) Economic and political dimensions:

-According to Defoe, how did the prevailing economic and political influences and imperatives in 17th Century London affect peoples' decisions about the plague? How did inequality and financial (individual) and economic (broadly social) stress play a role in how city-folk made decisions about how to avoid the plague (i.e., their "mobility of escape and avoidance")? What did the government do about this? Were they supportive? What were their policies, and how did they affect the citizens of London and their mobilities of escape and avoidance?

****LATE COURSE WORK:** If your "fieldnotes" analysis assignment is late, it will only be accepted without penalty with appropriate documentation acquired through the Academic Counselling Office:

http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/academic_accommodation/requesting_accommodation.html

Students who submit their assignment **after the due date** will have their grade reduced by a rate of 2% per day. Anything handed in more than one week late will receive a grade of zero.

Final exam: 35%

The final exam will be worth 35% of the final grade and will be scheduled by the Registrar's office. The exam will be cumulative and consist of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions.

Weekly readings:

Week 1: Week of January 9th

Setting the stage: An introduction to the anthropology of plague(s) and infectious disease

*** Marcia C. Inhorn and Peter J. Brown. 1990. The Anthropology of Infectious Disease. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 89 – 117.

Week 2: Week of January 16th

Historical accounts of the Great Plague of London

Daniel Defoe. 2001. *A Journal of the Plague Year*.

Pages: iii - 75

Week 3: Week of January 23rd

Historical accounts of the Great Plague of London, continued

Daniel Defoe. 2001. *A Journal of the Plague Year*.

Pages: 76 – 150

Week 4: Week of January 30th

Historical accounts of the Great Plague of London, continued

Daniel Defoe. 2001. *A Journal of the Plague Year*.

Pages: 151 - 186

Week 5: Week of February 6th

Conclusions on historical perspectives of plague: Toward alternative hypotheses of cause and spread

*** John Kelly. 2005. "Only the End of the Beginning". In *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time*. Pp. 274 - 294. New York: Harper Collins.

*** John Kelly. 2005. The Plague Deniers. In *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time*. Pp. 295 – 303. New York: Harper Collins.

Week 6: Week of February 13th

******Fieldnotes analysis assignment due by 11:59am, FEBRUARY 17th******

Contemporary plagues: Disease and inequalities

Paul Farmer. 2001. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*.

Preface: Pages xi –xl

Introduction: Pages 1 – 17

1. The Vitality of Practice: On Personal Trajectories: 18 – 36

Week 7: Week of February 20th

*****READING WEEK*****

Week 8: Week of February 27th

Contemporary plagues: Disease and inequalities, continued

Paul Farmer. 2001. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*.

2. Rethinking “Emerging and Infectious Diseases”: Pages 37 – 58
3. Invisible Women: Class, Gender, and HIV: Pages 59 - 93

Week 9: Week of March 6th

Contemporary plagues: Disease and inequalities, continued

Paul Farmer. 2001. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*.

4. The Exotic and the Mundane: Human Immunodeficiency Virus in the Caribbean: Pages 94 – 126
5. Culture, Poverty, and HIV Transmission: The Case of Rural Haiti: Pages 127 – 149

Week 10: Week of March 13th

Contemporary plagues: Disease and inequalities, continued

Paul Farmer. 2001. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*.

6. Sending Sickness: Sorcery, Politics, and Changing Concepts of AIDS in Rural Haiti: Pages 150 – 183
7. The Consumption of the Poor: Tuberculosis in the Late Twentieth Century: Pages 184 – 210

Week 11: Week of March 20th

Contemporary plagues: Disease and inequalities, continued

Paul Farmer. 2001. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*.

8. Optimism and Pessimism in Tuberculosis Control: Lessons from Rural Haiti: Pages 211- 227

9. Immodest Claims of Causality: Social Scientists and the “New” Tuberculosis: Pages 228 – 261

Week 12: Week of March 27th

Contemporary plagues: Disease and inequalities, continued

Paul Farmer. 2001. *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plagues*.

10. The Persistent Plagues: Biological Expressions of Social Inequalities: Pages 262 – 282

Academic Policies and Information:

Please visit:

http://anthropology.uwo.ca/undergraduate/course_information/academic_policies.html