

Public Health in Film and Fiction

Narrative works often provide dramatic insight into the multifaceted nature of public health problems, the complex circumstances giving rise to them and to societal responses to them, and to the personal experiences of those affected. Through the lens of film and fiction this course will examine the influence and impact of social, economic, and political circumstances (e.g., gender relations, globalization, militarism) on the health status of particular population groups. We will consider the interrelatedness of issues and influences, their local and global manifestations, and the manner in which they are affected by broader economic and political circumstances.

Our exploration will be conducted through film screenings, readings of fictional and scholarly works, student presentations, and extensive class discussion. Students are expected to attend all sessions and to actively participate in class discussions. To facilitate an analytic perspective on the public health issues and their cinematic presentation, students will be provided with an outline of questions to consider regarding the film and the public health issues raised in it. Referencing one of the screened films, students are required to submit a written response (in outline format) to the questions posited. Students should select a film other than the one their presentation is related to.

Each student will also be expected to make a brief and cohesive presentation regarding a public health issue (or aspect of one) raised in one the films screened. Films and related subject topics will be assigned at the first class. The class presentation should be based on assigned readings as well as additional material relevant to the assigned subject. Students are required to submit a written version (3-5 pages) of their presentation. The presentation and paper should provide factual background and information of the issues under consideration. References should be cited in the bibliography. In addition, following the screening of each film, students, working in teams of 3-4, will be expected to lead a critical discussion of the film and the significant public health issues raised. The team should come to class with at least 3 issues or questions for class discussion. These should be emailed to me by 9AM of the day of the presentation.

Students are also expected to read Philip Caputo's *Acts of Faith* and to write a review from a public health perspective. The review is due at the last class. Many different approaches can be taken. For example you could discuss Caputo's view of the relationship between public health and religion, ideology, war, and humanitarian assistance; the impact of gender relations and health in the circumstance described; his portrayal of the complex nature of the aid industry with regard to the diversity of organizations, motives, assumptions, constraints, and methods; the ethical issues and consequences (intended and unintended) of public health activities described in the book; his understanding of the cultural, political, and economic aspects of providing public health and humanitarian assistance in an international context and/or in regions of conflict; etc.

There will be no final examination. Course grade will be based on class participation (25%), individual class presentations and accompanying paper (20%); team questions and discussion (20%); film question outline (15%); and the review on *Acts of Faith* (20%).

Assigned Readings: Many of the recommended readings are available in *War and Public Health, 2nd ed.*, Barry Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., available at the NYU bookstore, as is Philip Caputo's *Acts of Faith*. Readings not in either book are available online (denoted by a § in the syllabus) or in the course packet (denoted with an * in the syllabus.)

You are requested to bring to the second class a passport size photo of yourself with your name legibly printed on the back; a Xerox of your NYU ID would be ideal.

If you wish to get in touch with me, please email me at: aj11@nyu.edu

Course Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Identify through the lens of film the key factors influencing the perception of various public health problems, their causes and societal responses.
2. Develop insight into the personal as well as the social dimension of contemporary public health issues through films and narrative work.
3. Examine how film makers and fiction writers have understood and attempted to elucidate the complex dynamic between local conditions, broader economic and political circumstances and public health.

Syllabus

May 20 & 22 Public Health Concepts, Institutions and Methods

Film: *Panic in the Streets* 96 min VCA12059

Readings:

*Charles Rosenberg, "Framing Disease: Illness, Society, and History," in *Framing Disease*, Charles Rosenberg and Janet Golden, eds, New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1992, pp. xiii-xxvi.

*Bernard Turnock, *Public Health, What It Is and How It Works*, 3rd ed. Sudbury, Mass: Jones and Bartlett, 2004, p. 3-28.

May 27 US Public Health Service Research: The Tuskegee Syphilis Study

Film: *Susceptible to Kindness* 45 min VCA 4945

§Alan Brandt, "Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study," available at: <http://www.sociology101.net/readings/Racism-And-Research.pdf>

*National Institute of Health, *Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams*, USDHHS, 2002, ch. 1.

May 29 & June 3 Globalization and Medical Research

Film: *The Constant Gardener* 129 minutes DVD 4130

Readings:

§David Rothman, "The Shame of Medical Research," *New York Review of Books*, 11/30/00, p. 60-64.

§Marcia Angell, "The Body Hunters," *The New York Review of Books*, 10/6/05, V.52(15):

Optional:

§Glantz, L.H. et al, "Research in developing countries: Taking 'benefit' seriously," *Hastings Center Rep*, 1998, 28(6):38-42.

§MSD, "*A Matter of Life and Death: The Role of Patents in Access to Essential Medicines*" available at: http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/reports/2001/doha_11-2001.pdf

Optional:

*Carel Ijsselmuiden & Ruth Faden, "Research and Informed Consent in Africa – Another Look," in *Health and Human Rights*, J.M. Mann, S. Gruskin, Michael A. Grodin, G.J. Annas, New York: Routledge, 1999, ch. 23, p.363-371.

June 5 & 10 Culture, Gender and Health: Female Circumcision vs Female Genital Mutilation

Film: *Moolaade* 124 min VCA 14901

Readings:

*Cook, Rebecca. "Gender, Health, and Human Rights," in *Health and Human Rights*, Jonathan Mann, Sofia Gruskin, et al., eds, London: Routledge, 1999, ch. 17, p. 253-264

*Annas, Catherine, "Irreversible Error: The Power and Prejudice of Female Genital Mutilation" in *Health and Human Rights*, Jonathan Mann, Sofia Gruskin, et al., eds, London: Routledge, 1999, ch. 22, p.336-362.

§http://www.who.int/topics/female_genital_mutilation/en/

June 12 – 24 Militarism & Public Health

Readings (Overview):

Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, "War and Public Health: An Overview," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch.1, p. 3-22.

Richard Garfield, "The Epidemiology of War," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, ch. 2, 23-36.

§Keifer, C., "Militarism and World Health," *Social Science and Medicine*, 1992; 34(7):719-24.

June 12 & 17 The Case of Iraq

Film: *The Three Kings* 115 min VCA 12240
 Lessons of Darkness DVD 1042 pt.1,2

Readings:

§Arya, Neil & Zurbrigg, Sheila, "Operation Infinite Justice: Impact of Sanctions and Prospective War on the People of Iraq," *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 2003, 94(1):9-12.

Susannah Sirkin et al. "Landmines" in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch. 7, p. 102-116.

Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, "The Iraq War," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch. 15, p. 243-263.

Arthur H. Westing, "The Impact of War on the Environment," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch. 5, p. 69-84.

Optional:

§*Saddam's Chemical Weapons Campaign: Halabja, March 16, 1988*. Available at.
<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/rls/18714.htm>

§ *Kurds background* - <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iraq203/crossroads03.html>

June 19 & 24 Impact of War on Civilian Populations: The Special Case of Women

Film: *Paradise Road* 132 min DVD 967

Readings:

Joanna Santa Barbar, "The Impact of War on Children," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch. 11, p. 179-192.

- Mary-Wynne Ashford, "The Impact of War on Women," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch. 12, p. 193-206.
- Michael J. Toole, "Displaced Persons and War," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch 13, p. 207-209.
- §Shana Swiss, & Joan Geller, "Rape as a Crime of War," JAMA 1993; 270(5):612-615.
- Les Roberts and Charles Muganda, "War in the Democratic Republic of Congo," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, p.279-287.
- MSF, International Activity Report 2003. "*Enough is Enough. Why Sexual Violence Demands a Humanitarian Response*," available at:
<http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/publications/ar/i2003/sexualviolence.cfm>
- Optional:
- §Rehn, E., and Sirleaf Johnson, E., The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and the Role of Women in Peace-building (Progress of the World's Women), *Women, War and Peace*, UNIFEM. Available at:
http://www.unifem.org/resources/item_detail.php?ProductID=17

June 26 Humanitarian Assistance

Readings:

Acts of Faith

- *Alain Destexhe, "From Solferino to Sarajevo" in *Health and Human Rights (H&HR)*, J.M. Mann, S. Gruskin, Michael A. Grodin, G.J. Annas, New York: Routledge, 1999, ch. 7, p. 75-82.
- Ronald Waldman, "The Roles of Humanitarian Assistance Organizations," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch. 22, p. 369-380.
- John Loretz, "The Roles of Nongovernmental Organizations," in *War and Public Health*, Barry S. Levy and Victor Sidel, eds., Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press., ch. 23, p. 381-392.
- *Renee Fox, "Medical Humanitarianism and Human Rights: Reflections on Doctors Without Borders and Doctors of the World," in *Health and Human Rights*, J.M. Mann, S. Gruskin, Michael A. Grodin, G.J. Annas, New York: Routledge, 1999, ch. 28, p. 417-38.