

Study Guide #3, 9/27-9/29: Urbanization and Health

Pernick, Martin S. "Politics, Parties, and Pestilence: Epidemic Yellow Fever in Philadelphia and the Rise of the First Party System." *William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (October 1972): 559-586.

Rosenberg, Charles E. *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 1987. pp. 2-98.

The readings this week look at two urban crises: yellow fever in Philadelphia in 1793, and cholera in New York City in 1832 (and 1849 and 1866 if you are a motivated and fast reader). Both are secondary sources, but both make abundant use of primary sources and provide a clear vision of what life was like during these epidemics. There are many important questions to keep in mind as you read both. Urbanization, which really got going in the US only in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, changed the health landscape for Americans. Why are cities vulnerable to certain kinds of disasters, in this case epidemics? Why are some people in cities more vulnerable to others? How do people in cities respond to epidemics and other disasters? What are the range of factors that influence these responses?

There are, of course, many parallels to the recent experience in New Orleans. Keep these in mind, because the parallels are informative about many enduring problems in the US (problems of race, poverty, role of local vs. federal governments, etc.), but stayed focused on the specific material in each reading.

Pernick, "Politics, Parties, and Pestilence": Martin Pernick is a historian of medicine, currently at the University of Michigan. In this essay he studies an outbreak of yellow fever that struck Philadelphia in 1793, when Philadelphia was both the political capital of the United States (prior to the creation of Washington, D.C.), and the major medical center in the country. His focus is on how the epidemic impacted city and national politics, especially the development of the two-party system in the United States. Do not get bogged down in the politics and personalities: you just need to know that there were two main factions, the Federalists (led by Alexander Hamilton, allied to the English) and the Democratic-Republicans (led by Thomas Jefferson, allied to the French). Try to learn several things from this article. First, what happens when an epidemic strikes a city? What choices do people make? What determines these choices? Second, how do people decide between competing medical theories? There were active debates about whether yellow fever was contagious or miasmatic, whether it should be treated with bloodletting or stimulants, etc. How did political and economic interests influence how people answered these questions?

Rosenberg, *Cholera Years*: Charles Rosenberg has been the leading figure in history of medicine in the United States since the 1960s, publishing countless important books and articles. *Cholera Years*, his first book (started while he was an undergraduate!), describes and analyzes three epidemics of cholera that struck the United States in the 19th century. I recommend reading the book in its entirety, but you are only obligated to read the introduction and the account of the 1832 epidemic (the introduction provides clues about what was different in 1849 and 1866). Read the introduction carefully, as this contains much important information. What do you think about his basic strategy -- using an outbreak of disease as a way to understand what culture, science, government, religion, etc., were like at different times? Is an analysis of a society during a crisis a fair representation of what that society is like? Are crises useful (or misleading) by exposing tensions that might not be visible during times of stability (think about the New Orleans flooding as well)? As for the outbreak itself... He provides a narrative overview, and then more detailed discussions of religion, poverty, medical responses, and government responses. How did New Yorkers (whether doctors, ministers, bureaucrats, or anyone else) explain the epidemic? What mix of science, religion, and morality contributed? How did New Yorkers respond? What is the connection between explanations and responses? For instance, sin played a prominent role in the explanatory frameworks; how did this shape responses?