

International Studies 294-01: Macalester College, Fall 2021

syllabus v4, September 1, 2021

Global Contagions, Past and Present

Instructor: David Chioni Moore, International Studies
Class block: Tues-Thurs 9:40 to 10:10 a.m., Theater 202
Office hours: Varied plus by appointment; [available on Google calendar](#). Office: Carnegie 410;
or possibly outdoors; or Zoom if useful or necessary
Contact: mooredc@macalester.edu

Description: Since winter 2020, the world's attention has been rightly consumed by the novel coronavirus and its consequent pandemic. But despite Covid-19's recent appearance, global contagions are hardly new. They have reshaped empires, transformed economies, fueled or arrested migrations, and upended countless lives and civilizations. This course will begin with pandemics basics and some thematic framing, then turn to our focus: major plague narratives by Camus (1947), Defoe (1722), and the 2011 Hollywood "outbreak" film *Contagion*. We'll attend to questions of transmission, mitigation, peril, foreboding, the unknown, inequality, scientific understanding, the role of the state, and more. Toward the end of the course we'll examine the current pandemic, and its impact on the world and on us, with information provided by ourselves in video and print. A wide range of final research papers may be pursued.

Teaching Modality and Schedule: Plans under Covid, and selves under Covid, can be fragile. That said, our current plan is to meet in-person in the spacious Theater 202 classroom, and engage in "normal" class discussion, though (at least for the first three weeks) masked unless speaking. If public health guidance changes, we will adjust. Also, since this course is just in its second offering, and since some of the material is "breaking news," expect syllabus adjustments as the class progresses.

Covid Notes: Every class, student, professor, and staff member at Macalester has been impacted by Covid in ways from minor to great. Added to that, *this* class is about the very thing that's upon us: contagion, a pandemic. This makes taking INTL 294-01 something like studying fire narratives while living in a burning building: much of it will be a very non-theoretical pursuit. Treating this material forthrightly, historically, comparatively, narratologically, and in a spirit of shared inquiry and mutual support, should empower us as the course unfolds.

In this context, during the course, communicate with me about any difficult situations you are in, whether they are directly or indirectly related to the pandemic. We will also be alert to our own health. If you are ill or suspect you may be ill, don't come to class. We'll make adjustments to make this work.

General Notes: Timely class attendance is integral to the course and its grade. Inform me in advance of conflict with any religious holidays and/or any relevant disabilities; we'll arrange acceptable alternatives and/or accommodations, and your grades will be unaffected. Phones off, out of sight, and out of mind.

Assignments/Evaluation:

brief preliminary paper	required but ungraded
short national Covid report: data and narrative	8%
informational or personal-reflective video	14%
first paper (5-6 pages), on Camus and contagions	14%
second paper (5-6 pages), on renarrating Defoe	14%
active and insightful class participation	20%
a longer (10-12 page) final research paper	30%

Course Schedule:

1. Thurs Sept 2: introduction, aims and scope
→ preliminary ungraded short paper due Mon Sept 6th, by 7:00 pm via email
2. Sept 7 & 9
Tues: Luckingham; Sehdev; Morens & Fauci “500th”; and Marani
Thurs: Markel; Eggleston; Morens & Fauci “What Is a Pandemic?”; and Farr
3. Sept 14 & 16
Christian W. McMillen: *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*, 2016
4. Sept 21 & 23
Tues: essays expanding on themes and topics found in McMillen: Jones, Killingray, and Tognotti
Thurs: essays by Molina, and the U.S. Homeland Security Council
5. Sept 28 & 30
Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947)
6. Oct 3 & 5
Tues: continue w/Camus, add Culler narrative chapter & write mini story
Thurs: essay by Valeska Huber, on globalization via disease prevention
7. Oct 10 & 12
Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (written and published in 1722, though it is an account of London in 1665)
8. Oct 19 & 21
Tues: continue with Defoe, plus McCormick, on rats in world plague history
→ Thurs: Macalester Fall Break 2021: no class
9. Oct 26 & 28
Tues: two essays on Defoe: Seager (on use and misuse of statistics), and McDowell (on gender, rumor, and information)
Thurs: TBD, to fill agreed-upon gaps and emerging class interests
10. Nov 2 & 4
Tues & Thurs: a film, *Contagion* (Warner Brothers, 2011), dir. Steven Soderbergh,

with Matt Damon, Laurence Fishburne, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Winslet and others
 Thurs: continue with *Contagion*, plus four brief movie reviews by Yamey, Santhakumar, Douthat, and Mueller

11. Nov 9 & 11

Tues: longer essays on *Contagion* by Kendal (multi-film public health perspective) and Baker (film studies)

Thurs: essay by Sutter, and 2020 report by UN Food and Agriculture Organization

12. Nov 16 & 18

Tues & Thurs: first and second discussions of participant video presentations (the videos themselves will be screened independently prior to class)

13. Nov 23 & 25

Tues: third and final discussion of participant video presentations

→ Thursday Nov 25th is Thanksgiving: enjoy this break!

14. Nov 30 & Dec 2

Tues & Thurs: national reports on Covid-19

15. Dec 7 & 9

Tues: final paper workshops in small groups in class

Thurs: concluding class

Mac Fall classes end Friday Dec 10, 2021. Finals period Dec 14-17

Final papers due Wednesday December 15th by 2:00 pm

Readings:

Preference for print: People who read in print rather than e-formats read more deeply, grasp more fully, and retain more substantially. Unless you have a compelling reason to use an e-reader, acquire these books in print form.

Books and Film (in order of reading for the class)

McMillen, Christian W. *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Camus, Albert. *The Plague* (1947), transl. Robin Buss. London and New York: Penguin Classics, 2014. (There are two English translations of this novel; the Buss is better. If you can read Camus in the original French, by all means do that!)

Defoe, Daniel. *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722, though it is an account of London in 1665). Edited by Paula R. Backscheider. New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1992.

→ Edition note: since Defoe is centuries beyond copyright, there are many available editions of this book. But the Norton, edited by Backscheider, is by a vast margin the best.

Soderbergh, Steven, director, screenplay by Scott Z. Burns. *Contagion*. With Matt Damon, Laurence Fishburne, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Winslet and others. Warner Brothers, 2011.

Articles and Essays (in order of reading for the class):

For class day #2:

Luckingham, Bradford. "To Mask or Not to Mask: A Note on the 1918 Spanish Influenza Epidemic in Tucson." *The Journal of Arizona History* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1984), pp. 191-204. www.jstor.org/stable/41859568

Sehdev, Paul S. "The Origin of Quarantine." *Clinical Infectious Diseases* Vol. 35, No. 9 (Nov. 1, 2002), pp. 1071-1072. www.jstor.org/stable/4483266.

Morens, David M., Jeffery K. Taubenberger, Gregory K. Folkers, and Anthony S. Fauci. "Pandemic Influenza's 500th Anniversary." *Clinical Infectious Diseases* 2010; 51(12):1442–1444.

Marani, Marco, Gabriel G. Katul, William K. Pan, and Anthony J. Parolari. "Intensity and Frequency of Extreme Novel Epidemics." *PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA)* 118.35, August 23, 2021. e2105482118; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2105482118>

For class day #3:

Markel, Howard, et al. "Nonpharmaceutical Interventions Implemented by US Cities During the 1918-1919 Influenza Pandemic." *JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association)*, August 8, 2007, Vol 298, No. 6: pp. 644-654.

Eggleston, William G. "Oriental Pilgrimages and Cholera." *The North American Review*, Vol. 155, No. 428 (July 1892), pp. 126-128. www.jstor.org/stable/25102418.

Morens, David M., Gregory K. Folkers, and Anthony S. Fauci. "What Is a Pandemic?" *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 200 (October 2009), pp. 1018–21.

Farr, Courtney. Obituary of Marvin J. Farr, December 2000.

<https://priceandsons.funeraltechweb.com/tribute/details/2456/Marvin-Farr/obituary.html>

To be read after McMillen's *Pandemics*:

Jones, David S. "Virgin Soils Revisited." *William and Mary Quarterly* (Oct. 2003), Vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 703-742. www.jstor.org/stable/3491697

Killingray, David. "A New 'Imperial Disease': The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-9 and its Impact on the British Empire." *Caribbean Quarterly*, Dec 2003, Vol. 49, No. 4, special issue on Colonialism and Health in the Tropics, pp. 30-49

Tognotti, Eugenia. "Scientific Triumphalism and Learning from Facts: Bacteriology and the 'Spanish Flu' Challenge of 1918." *Social History of Medicine* Vol. 16 No. 1 (2003): pp. 97–110.

Molina, Natalia. "Borders, Laborers, and Racialized Medicalization: Mexican Immigration and US Public Health Practices in the 20th Century." *American Journal of Public Health* Vol. 101, No. 6 (June 2011), pp. 1024-1031.

Homeland Security Council. *National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza*. Downloaded in PDF from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/national-strategy/index.html> on September 20, 2020.

To be read after Camus' *The Plague*:

Culler, Jonathan. "Narrative." Chapter 6 of his *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997, pp. 82-93.

Huber, Valeska. "The Unification of the Globe by Disease? The International Sanitary Conferences on Cholera, 1851-1894." *The Historical Journal*, June 2006, Vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 453-476. www.jstor.org/stable/4091623

To be read after Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*:

McCormick, Michael. "Rats, Communications, and Plague: Toward an Ecological History." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Summer, 2003), pp. 1-25.

McDowell, Paula. "Defoe and the Contagion of the Oral: Modeling Media Shift in *A Journal of the Plague Year*." *PMLA* Vol. 121, No. 1 (Jan 2006), pp. 87-106.

Seager, Nicholas. "Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics: Epistemology and Fiction in Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*." *Modern Language Review* 103 (2008), 639-53.

To be read after Soderbergh's film *Contagion*:

Douthat, Ross. "Going Viral." Review of *Contagion*. *National Review*, Oct 3, 2011, p. 50.

Yamey, Gavin, and Jimee Hwang. "An outbreak of scientific accuracy." Review of *Contagion* by Steven Soderbergh. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, Vol. 343, No. 7828 (22 October 2011), p. 850.

Mueller, Kristen L. "Nightmare of an Exploding Pandemic." Review of *Contagion* by Steven Soderbergh. *Science*, New Series, Vol. 334, No. 6059 (25 November 2011), p. 1064. www.jstor.org/stable/41351779

Santhakumar, Arthy. "Film: *Contagion*." *The World Today* (Chatham House, Royal Institute of International Affairs), Vol. 67, No. 11 (November 2011), pp. 15-16.

Kendal, Evie. "Public health crises in popular media: how viral outbreak films affect the public's health literacy." *Medical Humanities*. 2019 Jan 19;medhum-2018-011446. doi: 10.1136/medhum-2018-011446. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 30661040

Baker, Aaron. "Global Cinema and *Contagion*." *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Spring 2013), pp. 5-14.

For class November 11th:

Sutter, Paul S. "Nature's Agents or Agents of Empire?: Entomological Workers and Environmental Change during the Construction of the Panama Canal." *Isis* 98.4 (December 2007), pp. 724-754. www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/529265

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). "Policy Brief: The Impact of Covid-19 on Food Security and Nutrition." June 2020. <http://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1287907/>

Additional Major Recommended Works (separate from and not assigned in this course)

For those who enjoy learning from podcasts, the distinguished Yale historian of medicine Frank Snowden III recorded a 26-part podcast series in 2010 titled variously "Epidemics and Society," "Epidemics in Western Society," and "Epidemics in Western Society Since 1600."

Each lecture is a bit under 50 minutes. Regardless of the title, the series stretches far earlier than 1600: it covers the 14th century Black Death in depth, and extends to classical Greek and Roman theories of disease. It offers substantial global coverage too: by no means just the West. It attends to issues of biology, geography, power, the history of ideas, and more. I strongly recommend it as an additional channel of information on our subject.

This is also available in captioned video on the Open Yale Courses as a 26-part series of Prof. Snowden lecturing, currently at oyc.yale.edu/NODE/156. Its current YouTube address is www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoWxdlGBVTI&list=PL3AE7B3B6917DE8E6

- Saramago, José. *Blindness*. (Originally *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, Caminho, 1995). Translated from the Portuguese by Giovanni Pontiero. Boston : Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011. A speculative novel by the Portuguese Nobel Prize laureate about an outbreak of unexplained blindness in an unnamed city.
- Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. Revised 20th anniversary edition. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013. A landmark two-part play, staged first in 1991 and 1992, set largely in New York during the HIV-AIDS crisis at its mid-1980s peak.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World*. New York and London: OR Books, March 24, 2020. A work of high critical theory and cultural critique by the prolific Slovenian philosopher.

Additional Essays relevant to Defoe, Camus, and the specific example of the plague:

- Carmichael, Ann G. "Plague Legislation in the Italian Renaissance." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* Vol. 57, No. 4 (Winter 1983), pp. 508-525. Discusses public health laws in the light of early understandings of disease origins and transmission.
- Cohn, Samuel K., Jr. "The Black Death: End of a Paradigm." *American Historical Review* Vol. 107, No. 3 (June 2002), pp. 703-738. An early publication by an important historian of epidemic and disease. It claims that not all historical diseases called "plague" are in fact the same. See McMillen, pp. 25-27 for a consensus recent view. For Cohn's most recent book, see *Epidemics: Hate and Compassion from the Plague of Athens to AIDS*, Oxford UP, 2018.
- Loar, Christopher F. "Plague's Ecologies: Daniel Defoe and the Epidemic Constitution." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 32, no. 1 (Fall 2019), pp. 31-53. A discussion by a literary scholar of the interchange between human and environmental biology in Defoe and in current understandings.
- Nutton, Vivian. "The Seeds of Disease: An Explanation of Contagion and Infection from the Greeks to the Renaissance." *Medical History* 27, 1983, pp. 1-34. A rich and nuanced history of how disease origins and transmission were conceived of (effluvia, invisible seeds, miasma, etc.) prior to the late 19th century laboratory revolution. A concentrated instance of this is in Defoe, p. 64 of the Norton edition, or search for "calamity was spread" in a digital edition.)