Medical History 919
A History of Health Activism: Gender, Race, and Sexuality

They started free clinics. They took back the night. They lobbied Congress. They showed each other their cervixes. They practiced medicine without a license. They delivered babies. They insisted they weren’t sick. They insisted they were. They shouted, they marched, they shopped, they struck, they sat.

Health activists, working both inside healthcare professions and outside them, have profoundly shaped medical institutions, workplace environments, research agendas, disease boundaries, treatment options, and medical accessibility. This course examines the history of health activism in the United States, paying particular attention to the place of race, gender, and sexuality in health movements.
This course focuses on health activism in the United States, giving particular attention to health activism in the 20th and 21st centuries. We will be guided by several questions: What is health activism? How has it shaped the practice of and access to medicine? How is health activism gendered? How has health activism been shaped by race and racism? How has health activism shaped medical knowledge, research, and practice?

Our approach to health activism is primarily historical. Nevertheless, the readings include articles and books that are not written by historians in part to illustrate the many scholarly approaches to health activism and to highlight gaps in the historical literature. The course has been organized into five units: 1) What counts as health activism? 2) Seeking safe workplaces and healthy environments; 3) Increasing access to health care; 4) Organizing around diseases and conditions; and 5) Fighting for women’s health.

Requirements:
Seminar Participation 30%
Research Project 50%
Think Pieces 20%

Seminar Participation:
Participation in the seminar is important to the teaching and learning process and to your grade. It is not that I want you to speak for the sake of speaking, but I want you to accept some responsibility for teaching others by sharing your thoughts, questions, and ideas and for the direction and energy of the seminar. Students should have read and engaged both the assigned materials and the discussion questions before class.

Research Project:
The main goal of this seminar is for you to become acquainted with the history and historiography of health activism. In addition to the course readings, I would like you to develop a “research project” that deepens your engagement with the topic. I envision this project as something that will be helpful to you in your development as scholars. As a result, I am fairly flexible about the form it might take. Possible projects include a grant proposal for your dissertation on the “Mothers against Vaccination” movement, a literature review of the history of intersex activism, a historical paper on the anti-abortion movement in Chicago, or an essay on corporate involvement in health activism. Pitch me an idea. I only ask that it is based on
research (either primary or secondary) and that it fits within the theme of health activism; I prefer that the project is also, at least in some way, historical.

A paragraph-long description of your project will be due February 29. A page-long description with a preliminary bibliography will be due March 21. The first draft (not a rough draft) will be due April 25. The final draft will be due May 15. This paper should be about 20 pages in length.

Discussion Questions:
Every week students will write and post a “think piece” that somehow engages with the day’s reading. The approach to these essays is wide-open; I only ask that they be designed to help us all think about these texts before class. You may, for example, respond to a stock question: “What do these texts tell us about health activism?” or “How did health activism shape access to care?” “How does health activism affect medicalization?” Or you can ask (and respond to) a historical or historiographical question: “How did the Roosevelt administration influence the debates surrounding universal health insurance?” “How have historians of environmental health differed in their approaches to health activism?” Or you can explore an idea or claim you find particularly compelling. These essays may (but they needn't) connect each day's readings with other course materials. It’s up to you. These are not meant to be reviews, summaries, or critiques. They are meant as explorations, either historical or historiographical, of the texts in question.

Students will post these questions to the class discussion list by 10 AM the morning of class. These questions taken together should not be longer than one single spaced page of prose. (Every student can have three skips.)

WHAT COUNTS AS HEALTH ACTIVISM?

January 25  Different Questions, Different Actors, Different Models

SEEKING SAFE WORKPLACES, HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

February 1  Illness On The Job
Claudia Clark, Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935 (North Carolina, 1997)
Barbara Ellen Smith, “History and Politics of the Black Lung Movement,” 

February 8  **Industrial Pollution And Polluters**
David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz, *Deceit and Denial: Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution* (Cal, 2003)

February 15  **Environmental Toxins, Medical Uncertainty, And Gendered Activists**
Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty* (Duke, 2006)

February 22  **Environmental Justice in Urban and Rural Settings**

**INCREASING ACCESS TO CARE: RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER**

February 29  **Financial Access To Health Care**

March 7  **Medical Professionals And Racial Discrimination**
Naomi Rogers, “’Caution: The AMA May be Dangerous to Your Health’: The Student Health Organizations (SHO) and American Medicine, 1965-1970,” *Radical History Review* 80 (2001): 5-34.

March 14  **Models Of Community Health**
Jennifer Nelson, “‘Hold your head up and stick out your chin’: Community
Health and Women’s Health in Mound Bayou, Mississippi,” NWSA

ORGANIZING AROUND DISEASES AND CONDITIONS

March 21 Constructing And Deconstructing A Medical Condition
Joanne Meyrowitz, How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the
United States (Harvard, 2006)
Ronald Bayer, “Diagnostic Politics: Homosexuality and the American
Psychiatric Association,” in Homosexuality and American Psychiatry:
The Politics of Diagnosis (Basic, 1981), 101-154

March 28 Science, Politics, And Activism
Steve Epstein, Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge
(Cal, 1996)

April 11 Community Responses To Crisis
Susan Chambre, Fighting For Our Lives: New York’s AIDS Community and the
Politics of Disease (Rutgers, 2006)
Jennifer Brier, “‘Save Our Kids, Keep AIDS Out’: Anti-AIDS Activism and the
Legacy of Community Control in Queens, New York,” Journal of Social

April 18 Breast Cancer : Marketing a Cause
Cure in Twentieth-Century America (Oxford 2001)
Maren Klawiter, “Racing for the Cure, Walking Women, and Toxic Tourings:
Mapping Cultures of Action within the Bay Area Terrain of Breast

FIGHTING FOR WOMEN’S HEALTH

April 25 Building A Women’s Health Movement
Wendy Kline, Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women’s
Health in the Second Wave (Chicago, 2010)
Leslie J. Reagan, “Crossing the Border for Abortions: California Activists,
Mexican Clinics, and the Creation of a Feminist Health Agency in the

May 2 Women of Color Organizing
Jennifer Nelson, Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement (NYU,
2003)
May 9  Sterilization: Coercive and Withheld